

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 23 • May 1996



The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ **encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental region and their
conservation.**

■ **liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional
societies.**

■ **collate and publish
material on Oriental
birds.**

Two bulletins and a journal,
Forktail, are published annually

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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £12 per annum (£8 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries), £16 Family, £20 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £20 Libraries and academic institutions, and £36 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

OBC Web Site

<http://www.gold.net/users/dj10/obchome.html>

Cover illustration:

Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* by John Anderton. One of the globally threatened birds of the eastern Himalayas - Find out more on page 21.



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Club News



Forthcoming Meetings for 1996

**Blakeney, Norfolk,
Sunday 25 August**

The annual August Bank Holiday meeting at Blakeney Village Hall, Norfolk, will take place as usual, with doors opening at 11.00 am. Speakers will be Scott Connop from Canada, compiler of *Birdsongs of the Himalayas* and *Birdsongs of Nepal*, giving an audiovisual presentation on the sound recording of birds in the Orient, Nigel Bean talking on the Palas Valley in Pakistan and Pete Carr on wetland bird surveys in Cambodia.

**AGM, Regent's Park, London,
Saturday 7 December**

The AGM will again be held at the Meeting Room of the Zoological Society of London. Two speakers have so far been confirmed. Morten Strange from *Flying Colours Photography*, Denmark, is one of the leading photographers of Oriental birds. His work will be well known to members from the book *Birds: A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore*, and his contributions to the OBC Malaysia Special Bulletin. The other confirmed speaker is Nigel Collar of BirdLife International who will discuss the implications for conservation of the current taxonomic debates on 'splitting and lumping'.

**British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water,
Friday 16 - Sunday 18 August**

The annual British Birdwatching Fair will this year have an Oriental theme, as proceeds from the event will be donated to the BirdLife Ke Go Forest Reserve Project in Vietnam. There will be an OBC stand with OBC sales and an Oriental competition. The Club will also be providing speakers to the daily programme of illustrated talks.

Joint Meeting with Northamptonshire Bird Club, 2 October

The OBC will also be partaking in a joint evening meeting with the Northamptonshire Bird Club at Moulton Village Hall, Northampton, on Wednesday 2 October. Speakers will be Richard

Eden talking about the work of the OBC and Pete Morris on the Philippines. Doors will open at 7.30 pm and the talks begin at 8.00 pm.

We apologise for not having been able to organise a meeting in Asia or continental Europe this year, but it is planned to rectify this in 1997.

Book Auction - Two Books Remaining

In 1995 Bertram Smythies generously donated six copies of first and second editions of *Birds of Burma* and *Birds of Borneo* from his personal collection to raise money for the OBC Conservation Fund. Four books reached the reserve price in the sealed bid auction and this has raised £1,741 for the Club. The Club is very grateful to Bertram Smythies for this generous donation.

However two of the books did not reach the reserve price and are therefore re-offered for auction. They are as follows:

1. *Birds of Burma*. American Baptist Mission Press, Rangoon, 1940. First edition. Condition: paper and plates, excellent; endplate map, excellent; cover, very good, some adhesive tape markings; wrapper (original) fair, in two pieces, some adhesive tape damage, protected by an outer soft plastic wrapper. Complete with original errata slip. Inscribed: "To Mother and Father with love from Author Xmas 1940".
2. *Birds of Burma*. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1953. Second edition. Condition: plates, excellent; paper, very good to excellent; endplate map, excellent; cover, very good, with some adhesive tape markings; wrapper, excellent, intact, but with some adhesive tape markings; protected by an outer soft plastic wrapper. Inscribed: "For Mother and Father in memory of happy days at Castle Morris, where the whole of this book was re-written and re-typed in the summer of 1948" signed "Billy". Bears an apparent catalogue number "K397" in pencil.

Sealed bids for either of these books should be sent to the Club Secretary, clearly marked 'Book Auction' in the top left hand corner of the envelope. The deadline for bids is 1 November 1996.

News on the OBC Checklist

With this Bulletin, there is a flyer for a pre-publication offer for the OBC Checklist. After many years of preparation this mammoth piece of work will finally be published this year. All members are encouraged to take advantage of this offer for what will be THE checklist to the birds of the Oriental region. It is also hoped that many members will take part in the two-for-one scheme, which will enable a copy of the checklist to go to a member in the Orient, who otherwise would not be able to afford one.

In addition we are pleased to announce that publication of the checklist has been made possible, by further funding in the form of a grant of £2,000 from the Loke Wan Tho Memorial Fund. The Club thanks the trustees of the fund for their generosity.

New Corporate Sponsor

The Club welcomes Rohm Electronics (UK) Ltd as the latest OBC Corporate Sponsor.

A donation of £500 from Rohm Electronics (UK) Ltd will be used to produce a new t-shirt and to support the Conservation Fund. Rohm Electronics (UK) Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of Rohm Co. Ltd, Japan. The company is the largest supplier of electrical components to the UK market. From their Milton Keynes headquarters, Rohm supplies customers in the UK and Ireland with a broad range of quality components manufactured in factories in Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Another Business Supporter

We are also pleased to welcome Kingfisher Tours Sdn. Bhd. of Malaysia as the latest member of the Club's Business Supporters scheme. Their support will fund the honorary membership of three Oriental members.

Representatives Changes in Hong Kong and India

David Melville and Mike Chalmers have both had to stand down as co-reps for Hong Kong, due to pressure of work. We thank them both for the time and effort they have put into supporting the Club, particularly David who was one of the Club's very first representatives. Through their endeavours and the assistance of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society, membership in Hong Kong



German tour company Natur-Studienreisen GmbH recently visited Ba Bao Shan Reserve, Guangdong Province, China, where they donated OBC sweatshirts and a copy of the Chinese edition of *Birds of Hong Kong and South China* to nature guide Mr Yu Chang-Ping (far right) and driver Mr Chen Tu Tai (Photo: Eckhard Möller).

has grown dramatically over the last few years. We would like to welcome C.Y. Lam and Geoff Carey as the Club's new representatives for Hong Kong.

In India, Toby Sinclair has stood down as co-representative and been replaced by Bikram Grewal, who will now be working alongside Dr Asad Rahmani. Bikram is taking on all aspects of administering OBC membership in India. Indian members should from now on address ALL membership queries and payments, made out to OBC, direct to Bikram rather than to either UK or ANZ Grindlays Bank in Delhi. Correspondence should be addressed to 101/4 Kaushalya Park, Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016. Tel: 660607/6961520. Fax: 6864614. E-mail: bikram.gmpltd@axcess.net.in

OBC Publication Schedules

We would like to apologise for the late arrival of Bulletin 22 and *Forktail* 11, which we understand may have caused some confusion amongst members. All those with up-to-date subscriptions for 1995 should have received both these publications by now. Both were held up in production and in addition we experienced postal problems, particularly in Asia, with the reduced rate service we have been using. We hope all these problems have been rectified and the intention is now to produce the Bulletin in May and October of each year. In order to ensure this, the deadlines for submission of material for each issue has been brought forward to 15 February and 15 July. We are also working towards rescheduling *Forktail* and further news will follow.

Changes in Subscription Rates

Members are reminded that, as announced in the Bulletin 22, subscription rates will be increasing for 1997. In UK£ the rates will be as follows; ordinary member £15, reduced rate member £10, family member £20, library and academic institution £25 and supporting member £25. In US\$ the rates will be ordinary member \$25, reduced rate member \$16, family member \$32, library and academic institution \$41 and supporting member \$41. In India the new rates will be ordinary member Rp650 and reduced rate Rp425. In Thailand the rates will be 600 Baht ordinary and 400 Baht reduced. Any queries concerning other Indian or Thai rates can be addressed to the Club or the appropriate country representative.

Changes on Council

There were a number of very important changes on Council at the end of 1995. Nigel Redman stood down as Chairman after over four years in office. Nigel has been on OBC Council since the very beginning of the Club, and under his chairmanship, the Club has seen unprecedented growth. We have however not totally lost his expertise and experience as he has agreed to stay on Council.

Particular thanks should be given to Nick Gardner and Adrian Long who both stood down after four years in their respective posts. Nick as Promotions Officer single-handedly greatly increased the Club's income; particularly for the Conservation Fund, through his tireless work in enrolling new Corporate Sponsors and increasing advertising revenue. Adrian transformed the OBC Bulletin to the high-standard publication we see today. The dramatic growth in the Club's membership over the past few years can, to a great extent, be attributed to their efforts.

Other Council members standing down were Graeme Green who had served on Council for six years first as Sales Officer and more recently as Meetings Officer; Frank Lambert, Assistant *Forktail* Editor, who left to take up a job in Bangkok; and Dave Weaver who had served four years in the post of International Meetings Officer.

At the AGM we formally welcomed on to Council David Blakesley as Assistant *Forktail* Editor, Seb Buckton as Information Officer and Brian Sykes in a new post as Representatives Co-ordinator. Colin Poole has taken over as Chairman and Pete Morris as Meetings Officer. In addition, Richard Thomas has recently been co-opted onto

Council to take over as Bulletin Editor with effect from Bulletin 23. We are as always looking for members who would be interested in helping the Club out and serving on Council in 1997. If you are interested please contact Colin Poole.

Anybody Willing to Donate a Kodak Carousel Projector?

The Club is looking to obtain its own Kodak Carousel Projector for use at meetings. Due to the high cost of obtaining this, we wondered if any members may know of anybody willing to donate one? If so please contact Pete Morris, Meetings Officer.

Report on 1995 AGM and Mega-Prize Draw

The 11th AGM was again a great success. The meeting was used to launch the new Pica Press guide *Buntings and Sparrows* and with all three authors, Clive Byers, Urban Olsson and Jon Curson, present at the meeting, the NHBS stall did a roaring trade in signed copies. The Club is very grateful to Pica Press for contributing to Urban Olsson's travel expenses to attend the meeting.

The meeting began with a presentation by Clive Mann on the birds of Borneo, based on his many years in Brunei, with some excellent shots of birds in the hand from his ringing studies. This was followed by Simon Dowell of the World Pheasant Association who gave an entertaining and instructive presentation on the Galliformes of southern China. The final speaker was Urban Olsson who gave a detailed and informative talk on the identification of buntings in the Orient, including many slides of Clive Byers's excellent paintings from their new book.

The Club would like to thank Lonely Planet, GeoCenter, NHBSr Pica Press and Fuji for donating the day's raffle prizes; Helen Taylor for single-handedly organising the catering and making all the rolls which sold very well as always, and Margaret Sykes for manning the catering stall throughout the day.

The Mega-Prize Draw raised £3,508. Although slightly down on our 1994 record, possibly due to competition from the National Lottery, this is an excellent effort to support the work of the Conservation Fund. We thank everybody who bought tickets or sold them to their friends on the Club's behalf. The winner of the first prize of the Leica 10x42 binoculars was Mrs B. Moore from Wales.

We would like to give special thanks to all those who donated prizes, Leica Camera Ltd, WildWings, Focalpoint, NHBS, Oxford University Press, A&C Black, WildSounds, Fuji, New Holland. Thanks also to *Birdwatch*, *Birding World* and *British Birds* for helping to distribute tickets.

OBC Council Members Available for Talks

The Club would like to thank the Northamptonshire Bird Club for a donation of £40 in return for a talk given on the OBC by Council Member Richard Eden. Members of Council are often willing to give talks to local bird clubs on the work of the OBC, in return for a donation to the Conservation Fund. Anybody interested is requested to contact Mike Blair, OBC Secretary.

Early Bulletins Now Available as Photocopies

Anybody seeking back numbers of Bulletins Nos. 1-7 can now order photocopies at a cost of £2.50 per copy including postage, £3.50 airmail. Orders should be placed with Steve Broyd, Sales Officer.

Advertise in the OBC Bulletin

We would like to thank the many companies and organisations who regularly advertise in the OBC Bulletin. Advertising helps to offset the ever increasing cost of producing a high-quality colour publication. If your company or organisation would like to consider advertising in the OBC Bulletin the standard rates are as follows: full page £135/US\$235; half page £85/US\$145; quarter page £60/US\$100. Colour adverts are available at extra cost. If interested please contact the Club's Promotions Officer, Richard Eden, tel: 01604 769109, fax: 01908 282528.

Ordering from NHBS

We would like to remind all members that when ordering any publications from NHBS, the official OBC book suppliers, without using the form enclosed with this Bulletin, you should remember to mention that you are an OBC member. NHBS staff record this information and it directly affects the level of corporate sponsorship the Club receives from NHBS.

Many Thanks

The Club would like to thank several people for help over the past few months, in particular Stuart Holdsworth, who single-handedly took over the

running of the Mega-Prize Draw which ran extremely smoothly. This job is crucial to ensure the continued financial support of the Conservation Fund.

We would also like to thank Ed Keeble for his continued support on legal matters, Alan Wilkinson for running the OBC web pages and Dave Hatton for editorial support on this edition of the Bulletin. Finally, Rob Still of Rubythroat Publications, who as ever works long hours, coping not only with the Bulletin and *Forktail*, but also most of the Club's other publication and printing requirements.

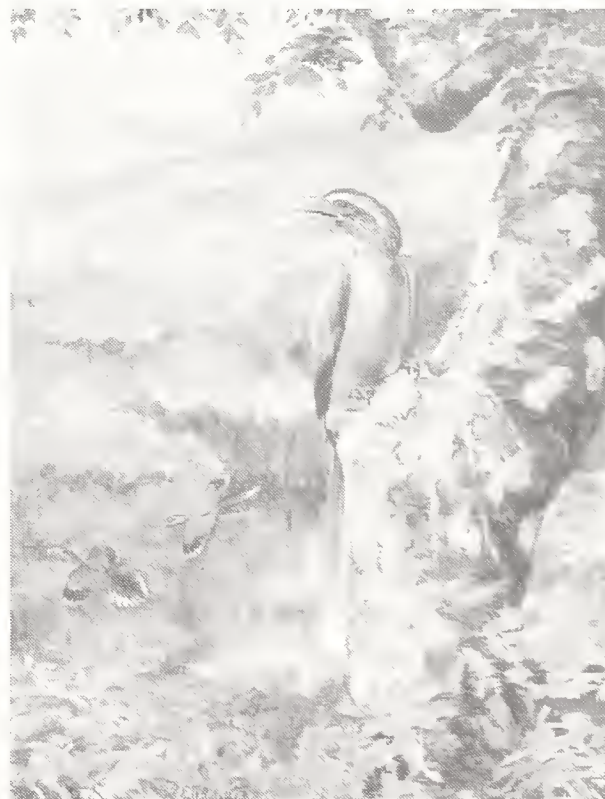
Apologies

Unfortunately two photographs were accidentally miscredited in the India Special Bulletin 22 and the Indian Birding Itineraries Supplement. They should have been credited as follows. Plate 7 on page 37 of the Bulletin, Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa*, taken by Kathleen and Mark Van Beirs. Plate 5 on page 5 of the Indian Birding Itineraries, Rufous-tailed Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* taken by Joakim Johanson. We would like to offer our sincere apologies to the photographers concerned.

India Special Cover For Sale

Carl D'Silva, artist of the magnificent painting of the group of three Malabar Grey-Hornbills *Oxyceros griseus* that graced the cover of the India Special Bulletin 22, has offered to auction the original painting in aid of the OBC Conservation Fund. The painting measures 245 mm by 185 mm. Bids are invited to be sent to the Club Secretary by 1 November 1996.

The Club is very grateful to Carl for this generous offer.



Malabar Grey-Hornbills
Oxyceros griseus by Carl D'Silva



Conservation Fund

Compiled by Melanie Heath and Carol Inskipp

Forktail-Leica Award 1995 – Status of White-naped Tit, Rajasthan, India

OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award 1995 - Children's Wildlife Camp, Danjungan Island, Philippines

1995 AWARDS

We are pleased to announce that the 1995 Forktail-Leica Conservation Award has been won by Jugal Kishor Tiwari to study the status and distribution of the **White-naped Tit** *Parus nuchalis* in Rajasthan, India. This globally threatened species is restricted to thick scrub and deciduous woodland in the semi-desert areas of Kutch, Gujarat and Rajasthan in north-west India and the eastern Ghats of peninsular India.

The project will take nine months to revisit sites in western Rajasthan where the species was previously reported 50 years ago and explore new areas with good tropical thorn forest. The White-naped Tit is a hole-nesting species totally dependent on old nests excavated by the **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*. The project will therefore look for the woodpecker and also common nest-competitor species such as **Chestnut-shouldered Petronia** *Petronia xanthocollis* and **Brahminy Starling** *Sturnus pagodarum*. Another globally threatened species, the **Green Avadavat** *Amandava formosa* also occurs in some of the proposed survey areas and habitat. The survey plans to identify the most important areas of tropical thorn forest and prepare a conservation action plan for the species.

The 1995 OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award has been made to the Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation for their proposal for a children's wildlife camp at Danjungan Island. The marine wildlife camp in April 1996 will be for 16 students aged 13-16 years and four science teachers from state schools from four coastal villages included in the area of the Philippine Reef and Rainforest Project (PRRP). The students, from both urban and rural backgrounds, will be exposed to activities including bird and marine wildlife identification, nature treks, skin-diving training, mangrove planting and lectures on marine and forest ecosystems and wildlife conservation. The funding provided by the OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award will support local school children and teachers who would not normally be able to afford to attend the camp.

It is intended that the students will become young conservationists and pass on what they learn in camp to their family, teachers and fellow students. It particularly targets the children of local fishermen so that they may understand the objectives of the PRRP in making Danjungan Island a marine and wildlife sanctuary.

RECENT CONSERVATION GRANTS

Spot-billed Pelican in Assam

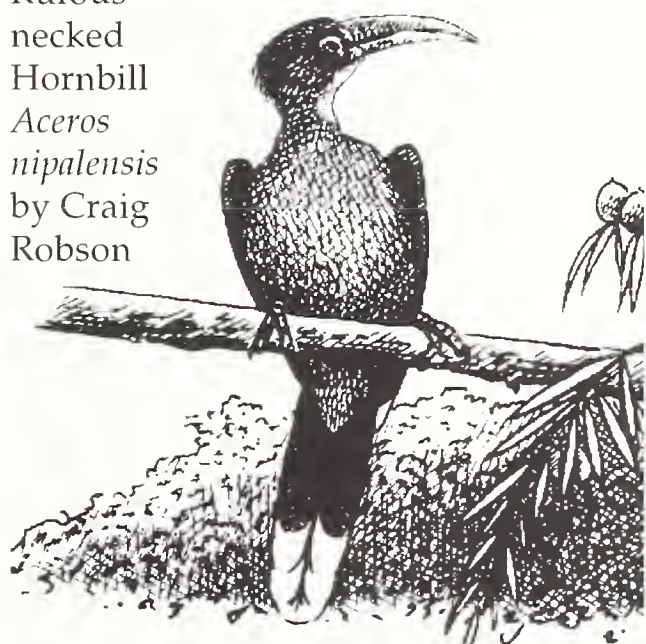
A grant of £500, part of a generous donation by Per Undeland, has been awarded to Bibhab Kumar Talukdar to survey the **Spot-billed Pelican** *Pelecanus philippensis* in Assam, India. OBC would like to thank Per Undeland for his continued support of the Conservation Fund. The Spot-billed Pelican is a globally threatened species, with a world population of less than 10,000 birds in South and South-East Asia. Assam is a stronghold with approximately 1,500 birds and a key area for the conservation of the species. This project will, over the period of one year, assess the current distribution of the Spot-billed Pelican in Assam. This information will be used to guide conservation action which is urgently required to reverse the species' decline.

Conservation Education and Bird Survey at Pa Son Nongkhu, Thailand

A grant of £500 has been awarded to Dr Oy Kanjanavanit and the Children Love the Forest School for conservation education work with local school children in Pa Son Nongkhu Provincial Park in Thailand. The children will study the birds in the park throughout 1996 and make illustrations in the field. The children will learn directly from nature whilst also helping scientists in their field research.

Lowland Forest Birds of Sikkim

Rufous-necked
Hornbill
*Aceros
nipalensis*
by Craig
Robson



Usha Lachungpa has been awarded a grant of £500, sponsored by *Birdquest*, for a baseline survey of lowland forests in the proposed Kitam Wildlife Sanctuary in south Sikkim, India. The Club is very grateful to *Birdquest* for its continued support of the Conservation Fund. The lowland forests in Sikkim have almost disappeared, converted to crops and tea plantations. Twelve globally threatened species have been reported from the lowland areas of Sikkim including **Chestnut-breasted Partridge** *Arborophila mandellii*, **Blyth's Kingfisher** *Alcedo hercules* and **Rufous-necked Hornbill** *Aceros nipalensis*. The project will concentrate on collecting information on threatened bird species along the Tista and Rangit river systems to determine their present status and distribution. This will greatly help in highlighting the conservation needs of the remaining forest in the proposed Kitam Sanctuary.

Oak Forest Bird Communities in the Kumaon Himalayas, India

A grant of £500, donated by Per Undeland, has been awarded to Jamal Khan to study the effects of habitat fragmentation and degradation on bird communities of middle altitude oak forest in the Kumaon Himalayas, India. The Kumaon Himalayas still possess some of the finest stands of middle altitude oak forest but much is highly fragmented and degraded. Indeed, large areas under oak forest in the past are today either barren, terraced for cultivation or have been replaced by chir-pine forest of little wildlife value. The remaining forest is under tremendous pressure, with very little protected under the national protected areas system. This study will systematically

Conservation of the Sichuan Partridge

survey the bird species richness and diversity in remaining patches of oak forests and investigate the impact of habitat fragmentation and degradation on the avian community. Data collected through this study will contribute to the development of a conservation strategy for bird communities through protected area planning, importantly taking into consideration the needs of local people.

A grant of £500 has been awarded to Simon Dowell, He Fen-qi and Dai Bo to survey the globally endangered **Sichuan Partridge** *Arborophila rufipectus* in the Daliang Shan region of Sichuan Province, China. The species is found in primary subtropical evergreen forest between 1,000 and 2,000 m in part of the South Chinese Forests Endemic Bird Area (identified by BirdLife International). Here the primary forests are being logged at a rapid rate and at present there are no nature reserves covering subtropical forest in this altitudinal zone. This study aims to determine the distribution and population status of the Sichuan Partridge, to assess the population density in the different forest types where it occurs, to assess the population density of other forest birds in the Daliang Shan region and to use the results to select suitable sites for establishing protected areas for the Sichuan Partridge and other forest birds.

CONSERVATION FUND IN ACTION

White-eared Night-Heron in Guangxi

Birdquest generously donated £500 to fund a survey of the **White-eared Night-Heron** *Gorsachius magnificus* in Guangxi Province in China between February 1994 and February 1995. Its forest habitat has been much reduced and it is now globally threatened. The species is only known from a small number of records from southern China, and by one record from northern Vietnam.

Between 1990 and 1994, I found the species at five localities in southern Guangxi: at Longu Shan in Long-an county, at three sites in Wuming county, and at Daming Shan which is between Wuming and Shangling counties. All the localities are amongst subtropical forested lower and middle mountains. The only previous record from Guangxi was of a specimen collected in 1929 at Yao Shan.

At Longu Shan disturbance from increased tourism threatens the night-heron. Between September 1993 and September 1994 300,000 tourists visited the mountain, which only covers 20 km². Although the mountain is a reserve, in recent years local people have begun to dig for gold in the lower reaches of the small river on the reserve, severely damaging the heron's feeding habitat. At two of the sites in Wuming county (Xianhu and Nada) there is a large reservoir surrounded by mountains which are still partly forested. Deforestation has severely degraded the habitat at Nada, but the forest is in better condition at Xianhu. The night-heron is also at risk from hunting at both these localities. At the third site in Wuming

county, Loxu, I found the night-heron feeding in paddy fields in open forest. This is probably only a feeding site. Daming Shan covers an extensive area of 649 km² and is 47% forested. I recorded the night-heron here five times in June 1994 at 1,200 m (four sightings of single adults and one of two young birds), but did not find the species during three winter visits. The habitat of Daming Shan is better than at the other sites and human threats are less.

Based on my survey it seems the species inhabits streams or small rivers in subtropical forested mountains in southern Guangxi. Where dams have been constructed, resulting in the disappearance of small streams, the night-heron has been observed feeding along the reservoir edge and sometimes in paddy fields downstream. The species is seriously threatened by deforestation in southern Guangxi. According to my survey it seems likely that the species breeds in Daming Shan at about 1,200 m and winters at lower altitudes below 500 m in Xianhu and Loxu, which are about 40-50 km distant. To date we do not know for certain whether the White-eared Night-Heron undertakes vertical migration. This remains a question to study further.

Zhou Fang

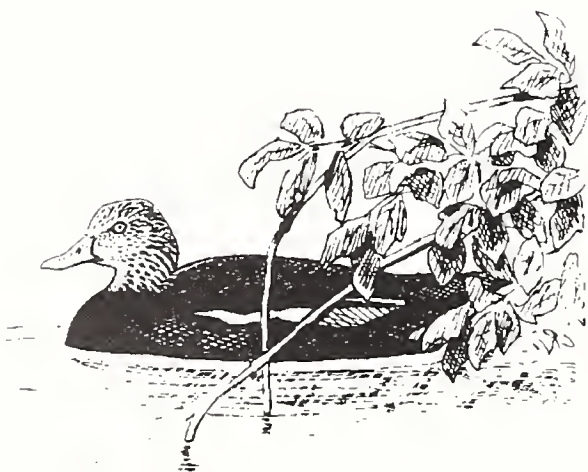
Talaud and Sangihe Expedition 1995

A grant of £500 funded a team of biologists from Sam Ratulangi University, north-east Sulawesi, and the University of York, England, to assess the threatened endemic avifauna of the Sangihe and Talaud Islands in north-east Indonesia in 1995. Talaud and Sangihe comprise two island groups located between north Sulawesi in Indonesia and Mindanao in the Philippines, and are one of the remotest parts of Indonesia. Together these two island groups form an Endemic Bird Area with five unique species. Of these the **Red-and-blue Lory** *Eos histrio* occurs on both island groups, the **Talaud Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus enigma* is endemic to the Talaud group and the **Sangihe Hanging-Parrot** *Loriculus catamene*, **Cerulean Paradise-Flycatcher** *Eutrichomyias rowleyi* and **Elegant Sunbird** *Aethopyga duyvenbodei* are unique to the Sangihe group. An additional five restricted-range bird species occur on the islands. The main threat to these species has been habitat destruction. Indeed, on Sangihe, only two small remnant patches of primary forest are found. It was thought likely that Cerulean Paradise-Flycatcher and the Sangihe subspecies of Red-and-blue Lory had become extinct as a result of the almost total destruction of their forest habitat.

The aim of the project was to clarify the status of, and threats to, the islands' endemic avifauna and their habitat. This involved three main lines of enquiry: the collection of data on population density, distributions and ecological requirements of the endemic avifauna; collection of information on associated habitat; and the assessment of human influences on the avifauna and its environment, and attitudes towards their conservation.

Preliminary analysis of the survey results suggests that the population of the Red-and-blue Lory subspecies *E. histrio talautensis* on Talaud is higher than the previous 1991 and 1994 estimates of 2,000 birds. The largest numbers of birds were seen in the plantations surrounding the forested interior of the island,

Survey of White-winged Duck and Bengal Florican in North-East India



White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*
by Craig Robson

where they were seen regularly feeding on coconut flowers. Also on Sangihe a small population of what was probably *E. histrio histrio* was discovered.

The Sangihe Hanging-Parrot was observed to be locally common in the vicinity of the market gardens around Gunung Sahendaruman and also near Tahuna. The Talaud Kingfisher was found to be common within the forested interior of the island, where evidence was also found of it breeding sympatrically with **Collared Kingfisher** *T. chloris*. The Elegant Sunbird was found to be common around the forest edge and market gardens and also probably in remnant forest. Perhaps most importantly one female Cerulean Paradise-Flycatcher, was seen in scrub in mixed *kebun* adjacent to remnant forest patches, and information was collected on five sites where the bird had been recently seen.

Jon Riley

A grant of £500, donated by *WildWings*, was awarded to Dr Choudhury to survey the globally threatened **White-winged Duck** *Cairina scutulata* and the **Bengal Florican** *Eupodotis bengalensis* in the poorly known areas of eastern Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India. The project, which was the first detailed study of these two species in the area, was carried out from July 1992 to July 1994, with a brief survey in November 1995. The survey covered the Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of Assam and parts of Dibang Valley, Lohit, Changlang and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

The White-winged Duck was once not uncommon in the pools and channels of tropical forests of South-East Asia, but has now become extremely rare with a very thinly distributed scattered population. The study area is one of the last strongholds and more than 30 individuals were discovered during the present study. Although the species usually nests in the cavities of trees, ground-nesting was also recorded for the first time. The usual group size appeared to be a pair or a male and two females and the maximum seen together was a loose group of 14. Although it is difficult to assess the actual population size of such a secretive bird, it was estimated that more than 290 ducks are present in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh in Assam and at least 50 in the study areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

The study found that the Bengal Florican survives in the grasslands of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of Assam and East Siang, Dibrung Valley and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The estimated population has been calculated at approximately 100 in the area.

Habitat destruction continues to be the major threat to the survival of both species. Collection of live ducklings of the White-winged Duck, pollution of waterbodies by the oil and tea industries, and the uncontrolled grazing of grasslands are other important threats. Through this study new key sites for conservation have been identified and recommended for protection. Copies of the project's final report have been given to the forest departments and detailed discussions have been held with senior officials concerning implementation of the project's recommendations.

Dr A. U. Choudhury



Around the Orient

Compiled by Colin Poole

Formation of Wetlands International

In October 1995 Dato' Sri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, opened an international conference in Malaysia announcing the creation of a new global organisation for wetland conservation. Wetlands International has been created by the merger of three existing bodies: Asian Wetland Bureau, International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau, and Wetlands for the Americas. Its mission is to sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations, through research, information exchange and conservation activities worldwide. Wetlands International has three regional operations in Asia/Pacific, Africa/Europe/Middle East and the Americas, each governed by separate regional councils. The regional operation for Asia/Pacific is based in the former Asian Wetland Bureau offices in Kuala Lumpur. The new organisation was formally launched and fully operational in early 1996.

CAMBODIA

Logging Continues

In November 1995, the government of Cambodia announced that action against illegal logging operations had cut the illegal export of timber to Thailand to less than 100,000 m³ per month.

Following this, in January 1996, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the Cambodian co-premier, announced that the government was reworking controversial logging concessions. He designated 1996 as "reforestation year in Cambodia" and vowed the logging companies would not be allowed to cut trees in national parks. However, further work by the NGO Global Witness, has revealed that the government has now designated as many as 6,500,000 ha (approximately one-third of the country) as logging concessions, with some of the largest concessions reportedly going to Malaysian and Indonesian companies. This is of even greater concern as Cambodia's total forest cover is now only estimated at 30-35%. Furthermore Global Witness have found illegal trade to Thailand is continuing unabated, much of it generating revenue for the Khmer Rouge. At least six of Cambodia's existing protected areas are situated along the Thai border in areas of Khmer Rouge influence and control, and these are already being extensively logged.

CHINA

New Short-tailed Parrotbill Site found in South China

A new site for the globally threatened and little known Short-tailed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis davidianus* has been discovered in southern

China, well away from its previously recorded range in northern Fujian. The species has recently been found at Mang Shan National Nature Reserve in Yizhang county in southern Hunan Province. According to a report in the *Chinese Journal of Zoology*, the Short-tailed Parrotbill apparently breeds at this site in the Nanling mountains near the border with Guangdong, but is quite rare.

A male was trapped in March 1992 and small flocks were seen in May 1992 and September 1994. The male was trapped near the Dashui Jiang River at an elevation of 1,250 m, while the small flocks were seen by a stream at a height of 110 m. The Mang Shan specimen differs from specimens from Guadun in Fujian Province, where La Touche found the species in the 1920s and near where it has recently been rediscovered by Mike Crosby and others. The Mang Shan specimen has a pale head and neck and lacks the light brown (yellowish?) streaks on the lower throat reported from Guadun; also the fresh Mang Shan specimen, held at Beijing Teachers' University, had reddish rather than light brown legs and claws. The report says it is unclear which of the three known subspecies the Mang Shan birds belong to. It gives the following measurements for the male specimen: weight 8.5 g, wings 52.5 mm, culmen 9 mm, tarsus 18 mm, tail 43 mm.

Contributed by Michael Rank.

New Black-faced Spoonbill Site in South China

Seven globally threatened Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* have been reported from Shankou in Guangxi Province in southern China. The magazine *Da Ziran* (Nature) reports that the birds were seen in April 1995 at the Hongshulin National Nature Reserve on the Beibu Gulf in south-eastern Guangxi near the border with Guangdong. The report notes that the Beibu Gulf is believed to be a wintering area for the species, but it is not clear whether the birds seen at Hongshulin winter there, or were on passage. Up to 68 Black-faced Spoonbills have been reported wintering on the western Vietnamese coast of the Beibu Gulf. The Hongshulin (Red Forest) Reserve was established in 1990 and covers 37 km².

Contributed by Michael Rank.

New Studies on Chinese Monal in Gansu

Studies by Zang Tao on the globally threatened Chinese Monal *Lophophorus lhuysii* in the Baishuijiang Nature Reserve, southern Gansu, have been reported in the *Chinese Journal of Zoology*. Zang assessed the population of Chinese Monals in three different habitats within the reserve, recording 24 birds in 8 km² of alpine shrub grassland above 3,000m, 9 birds in 6 km² coniferous forest between 2,700m-3,000 m and 3 birds in 6 km² of mixed forest between 2,300m-2,700 m. They were primarily found in five districts of the reserve, on the north side of the Motian Ling, but are reported to be under threat from the continual

reduction of their habitat. Although the birds did not have fixed roosting places, they generally roosted in tall pine trees, the males becoming active and starting calling at about 6.00 am or 6.30 am. In the non-breeding season, they formed flocks of 8 or 9, sometimes up to 10 or 20 birds.

Siberian Cranes Disappear from Poyang

The drying up of Poyang Lake, Hunan Province, the location of the world's largest population of Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* with up to 2,800 birds in recent years, has led to only 100 birds being recorded this winter. 61 birds were found at East Dongting Lake, but the whereabouts of the rest of the population is not known. However, Poyang did support 2,000 - 3,000 Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus* this winter, probably 10% of the known world population and the most important wintering site in the world.

HONG KONG

Mai Po - More Success, but the Fight Continues

Despite its new-found status as a Ramsar site (see *Around the Orient*, Bull. OBC 22), the Mai Po area is still under threat from development, but there have been a number of recent successes for Hong Kong environmentalists. In October 1995 the Town Planning Appeal Board dismissed a 31 ha development at Wing Kei Tsuen, which would have been situated in a fish pond area within Buffer Zone Two, immediately outside the Ramsar boundary. The grounds for the dismissal

included that the scale of the development was too excessive to meet the government's planning intentions, which are to conserve the natural landscape and to retain existing fish ponds to act as a buffer for Mai Po and Deep Bay.

Following this, in January 1996 the Hong Kong Court of Appeal turned down the infamous 98 ha residential and golf course Nam Sang Wai development, otherwise known as Sunnyville. Again, one of the main grounds of the decision was the fact that filling in the fish ponds and building eight-storey residential complexes would jeopardise the ability of the area to act as a buffer zone for Mai Po. However, the chapter is still not closed as the developer (Henderson Land) is now planning, later this year, to take the case to the Privy Council in London.

Development Threat in Tai Po Kau

Tai Po Kau, the largest forest in Hong Kong, is threatened by commercial development. Although the reserve was designated as a special area in 1977, an orchard under private ownership in the central part of the reserve was excluded. Ownership of this orchard changed hands in 1994 and a residential development proposal was submitted to the Town Planning Board in 1995. Although the orchard is zoned as green belt, this legislation still allows housing or even mining developments. Tai Po Kau is not only Hong Kong's largest, but also most mature forest area and over 140 bird species have been recorded.

INDIA

Siberian Cranes Return to Bharatpur

On 1 February, after an absence of two years, four (three adults and one juvenile) Siberian Cranes returned to Bharatpur. The young bird was wearing a colour ring indicating that it had been ringed as a chick on 29 August 1995 at Kunovat, in the Ob River basin, Siberia. Although the original decline in this population has been attributed to hunting on migration, one theory for their return is that a change in the grazing regime at Bharatpur has resulted in a greater availability of their major food resource, the tuber of an aquatic sedge *Cyperus rotundus*.

Fire Sweeps Nagarhole National Park

The Rajiv Gandhi National Park, Mysore, more commonly known by its earlier name of Nagarhole National Park, was swept by fire in March 1996. An estimated 400 ha forest tract of the park stretching between Murkal and Kallahalla was reduced to ashes. The 650 km² park is a key research centre and apparently important for populations of Tiger *Panthera tigris* and Elephant *Elephas maximus*. The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but officials blame local residents. It was apparently difficult to tackle as it began in various areas.

New Information on White-winged Ducks in Assam

Recent surveys of two protected areas in Assam have added new information on the state's populations of the globally

threatened White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*. Surveys and data collected from staff between October 1994 and August 1995 from Nameri Sanctuary formally confirmed the presence of White-winged Duck for the first time. A population of 23-29 birds was estimated, primarily in the south-east of the sanctuary. Surveys in Doomdooma Reserved Forest, thought to be one of the species' strongholds in the state, recorded 36 sightings in 29 visits to four different areas of the reserved forest between May 1991 and January 1995.

Mystery Deaths in Important Harrier Roost

Work this winter by K. K. Mohapatra of the Bombay Natural History Society has revealed alarming rates of mortality in an important harrier roost at Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh. The roost contains more than 1,000 harriers, mostly Montagu's *Circus pygargus*, some Pallid *C. macrourus* and one or two Pied *C. melanoleucos* and Northern *C. cyaneus*. Local sources revealed that every week at least 50-60 harriers die from an unknown cause. Mohapatra reports, "Every week at least, one can see three to four harriers die, decompose and no predators touch them".



Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* by Dave Bakewell

Waterbird Numbers Plummet at Chilka Lake

Indian ornithologists report a dramatic decline in waterbirds using Chilka Lake, Orissa, this winter. Chilka has long supported one of the largest concentrations of wintering waterbirds in India. Much of the problem apparently arises from a continued deterioration in the lake's condition. At least ten rivers and rivulets are now being discharged into the lake rather than the sea and this, in conjunction with the choking of the mouth of the lake, has raised the water level, completely submerging the 15 km² Nalabana Sanctuary. It has also led to a decrease in the salinity of the lake and the subsequent spread of water weeds and water hyacinth. In addition it is estimated that 13 million tonnes of silt are deposited into the lake every year and the lake's entire margins are now covered by prawn farms. However, the birds may have moved to Bhitarkanika Sanctuary, 200 km away, as it is reported that the waterbird concentrations have trebled there this winter.

Spot-billed Pelican Nursery Opened in Karnataka

The population of globally threatened Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* at their only breeding colony in Karnataka State - Kokkare Bellur in Mandya District - has declined from well over 2,000 breeding birds 30 years ago, to a mere 330 birds in 1995. The two main reasons are thought to be the loss of the birds' preferred nesting trees and the high mortality of fledglings which fall from the nest. Abandoned by their parents, they

subsequently die of starvation, or fall prey to local dogs. In 1995 more than 40 fledglings were found to have died in this way. In response to this, local birdwatchers have started a nursery to care for the young. Local boys collect the nestlings and bring them to a special pen, where they are fed on fish bought from the local market. Over 40 nestlings were thus successfully cared for in 1995.

INDONESIA

Lesser Masked-Owl Rediscovered

On 29 January 1996, a team led by David Bishop made the first confirmed sighting of Lesser Masked-Owl *Tyto sororcula* since it was collected in 1923. The bird was discovered on southern Yamdena in the Tanimbar Islands; it was spotlighted for two minutes in tall primary forest at the edge of a new logging track, before fluttering off. Unfortunately, no vocalisations were heard.

Rediscoveries on Buru Island

A joint PHPA/BirdLife survey of Buru Island during October-December 1995 has resulted in nine out of the ten Buru endemics now having been located, two of which, Streaky-breasted Jungle-Flycatcher *Rhinomyias addita* and Rufous-throated White-eye *Madanga ruficollis*, had not been seen for 70 years. Streaky-breasted Jungle-Flycatcher, last recorded in 1921, was commonly seen in logged forest and primary forest at Fogi (500 - 1,100 m) and one adult and two juveniles were mist-netted. Rufous-throated White-eye, last seen in 1922, was uncommon, with two

individuals seen in a mixed species feeding flock at Danau Rana (1,460 m).

Black-lored Parrot *Tanignathus gramineus* was also found for the first time in several years in a mountainous area (1,000-1,700 m) of Waekeka forest. The bird is believed to be nocturnal and, although not seen well, many were heard calling throughout the night until 7.00 am, and responded to playback. The only recent sight record of the species was of two birds seen in daylight by F. Smiet in 1980.

Contributed by Rudyanto.

JAPAN

Tracking Demoiselle Cranes by Satellite

The Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) has been studying the migration of cranes by satellite-tracking for several years in co-operation with NEC. During summer 1995, WBSJ researchers caught 21 Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* in Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and the Daursky Nature Reserve, Russia and fitted them with transmitters. During the autumn three of the cranes from Mongolia were tracked migrating along the central Asian flyway over the Himalayas to a wintering site in north-west India.

Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* by Mark Fenton

Last Japanese Crested Ibis Eggs Fail to Hatch

The five eggs laid by Fengfeng, the female Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* originally from China, which was flown to Japan to mate with Midori, Japan's now sadly departed last Crested Ibis (see *Around the Orient*, Bull. OBC 21), have all unfortunately failed to hatch, bringing to a final end the Japanese population of Crested Ibis.

Kyushu Wetlands Disappearing

There are nine tidal-flat wetlands in Kyushu that meet the Ramsar criteria of international importance. All are unprotected and many are under great threat. In July construction began on a 401 ha artificial island in Hakata Bay. Dredging from this operation has already resulted in the loss of the bay as a staging site for 2,000 Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* and up to 60,000 Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* (peak counts of only 100 and 20,000 respectively this winter). Equally worrying is the intention of the local government to open up land



surrounding the Imazu tidal flat in the western bay for housing. Imazu annually supports up to 12 Black-faced Spoonbills and between 20-30 Saunders's Gulls *Larus saundersi*.

In total Kyushu's tidal flats support 1,000 wintering Saunders's Gulls, and Isahaya Bay with a peak count of 283 is their most important wintering site. Isahaya's 3,000 ha tidal flat is, however, being completely reclaimed and the closure of the project's outer sea wall is expected in 1997. To add to this, a 500 ha tidal flat at Sone, in northern Kyushu, is suffering from a loss of water quality from construction of an offshore airport and is also being targeted for reclamation. This area supports up to 230 wintering Saunders's Gulls. Two other sites holding over 3% of the population are also threatened. Therefore, of Kyushu's wintering population of Saunders's Gulls, 700 are currently threatened by loss of habitat.

The only internationally important non-tidal flat wetland in Kyushu is Izumu, the renowned wintering site for Hooded *Grus monacha* and White-naped Cranes *G. vipio*. Izumu consists primarily of paddy fields with two small estuaries. The area is not a reserve but is leased from local farmers. With most of the 10,000 cranes present in 1992 roosting in only 1.5 ha of flooded paddy fields, serious concerns about disease have arisen. Recently numbers have been falling; this winter's peak reached only about 8,500, a decline of 20% from the 1992 peak, and the first decline in nearly 40 years.

Contributed by Nial Moores.

LAOS

More Dam Progress

Following on from Nam Theun 2 (see *Around the Orient*, Bull. OBC 20), several more dam projects are reported to be well underway in central and southern Laos. These include three further projects in the same biologically important Nam Theun river basin; Nam Theun 1, Nam Theun 3 and Nam Theun-Hinboun. Designed specifically to sell power to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, these projects are being financed by, among others, the Asian Development Bank and Norpower (a partnership of Vattenfall of Sweden and Statkraft of Norway).

In addition in southern Laos the Xe Kong River basin is now also threatened by three dams: Huay Ho on the Bolaven Plateau, already under construction by Daewoo of Korea; the proposed neighbouring Xe Pian-Xe Nam Noy; and Xe Kaman 1, for which a deal has been signed by the Hydroelectric Commission's Enterprise Corporation of Tasmania/John Holland partnership and which will flood 190 km² of largely protected forest. The area threatened by Xe Pian-Xe Niam has recently been confirmed to hold a population of 15 - 30 White-winged Ducks, and the area is also reported to be important for several other threatened species, including one of the region's last strongholds for Tiger *Panthera tigris*.

However, all may not be well for Nam Theun 2. Firstly, the Bangkok daily *The Nation*

revealed that the project planners had been using outdated topographical maps, and underestimated the maximum size of the reservoir. It is now estimated that it will flood 447 km², rather than 340 km², displacing many more people than previously expected. Secondly, the World Bank - who would supply only a small part of the finance but would guarantee remaining commercial loans - rejected the first environmental impact study as it apparently did not meet their standards or provide enough detail. They are currently holding back their approval pending the results of a second environmental impact study, and this is unlikely to be produced until 1997. The French state power company, Electricité de France, which holds a 30% stake, have now warned that they may pull out of the project if approval is not secured by the end of the year.

PAKISTAN

News on the Palas Valley Project

Following the decision of the European Union in June to commit a grant of £4 million to the BirdLife proposed Palas Conservation and Development Project, the government of North West Frontier Province committed an additional PRs 30 million (£600,000) in December 1995. The government has initiated a much-needed reform process in the forest sector in a last-ditch effort to save Pakistan's Himalayan forests. Proposed reforms include the allocation of certain forested areas to biodiversity conservation and

other non-timber functions, the introduction of joint forest management, and a more conducive legal, institutional and policy framework for sustainable and equitable forest management. The Palas project is contributing to this process.

Meanwhile, further botanical surveys have been completed in collaboration with the National Herbarium and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and further surveys of the winter distribution of the Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* are underway. Farmers have been trained in the maintenance of seed quality, and improved varieties are now expected to spread rapidly in Palas. Together with newly introduced fruit crops, this will improve local nutrition and take pressure off forest resources. Razwal Kohistani and Dr Ruth Schmidt have received the first Daudpota Environmental Education Award for their development of a script for the Palasi dialect, and its use in a literacy and environmental education for local school children.

PHILIPPINES

Sulu Sea Seabird Surveys

Recent surveys of South (or Lighthouse) Islet and North (or Bird) Islet, two tiny remote islets in the Tubbataha Reef National Park in the Sulu Sea, recorded populations of several breeding seabirds, including 1,500 boobies, mainly Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster*, 5,000 Brown Noddies *Anous stolidus* and large numbers of Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*. Numbers of

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* were found to have decreased since previous surveys in 1981, 1991 and 1993 and Red-footed Booby *S. sula* and Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana* could no longer be located. However, two globally threatened species were recorded, Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* and Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*.

SINGAPORE

Senoko Finally Lost

The battle to save Senoko, Singapore's richest bird site, was finally lost in March 1995. All of the eastern part which included the key ponds used by waterfowl was filled in, with only a small 20 ha area of mangrove, riverine forest and ponds remaining intact in the western sector. This area too may not remain for long as it is designated to be part of an industrial estate.

Contributed by Lim Kim Seng.

Reclamation Threatens Two Proposed Coastal Reserves

A proposed reclamation scheme designed to add 100 km² to Singapore's land area has put two of Singapore's most important coastal sites and proposed nature reserve areas under threat. Khatib Bongsu, a 75 ha site with 12 nationally threatened species and the largest wintering site for Chinese Egret in Singapore, is earmarked for a road construction and housing development similar to that at Senoko, whilst Mandai, Singapore's largest surviving shorebird site, vital for over 2,000 wintering waders, will be completely reclaimed.

Contributed by Dr Ho Hua Chew.

TAIWAN

Taiwanese Reserve Under Threat

The recently designated Bird Protection Area on the Tatu Estuary, near Taichung, Changwa county, is already under threat and the Wild Bird Society of ROC reports that the area is being cut into pieces before planning for the reserve has even been completed.

Perhaps the most serious threat is the setting up of a landfill rubbish dump, work on which has already begun. However, other threats include a new road along the shoreline, with bridge supports being built within the reserve and the erection of transmission line poles on the tidal flats by the Taiwan Power Company. The Tatu Estuary is one of the most important coastal wetland areas in Taiwan, especially for feeding herons and egrets and wintering waterbirds, particularly ducks and waders, and also holds one of Taiwan's largest wintering concentrations of Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*.

THAILAND

News from Khao Nor Chuchi

Phase 2 of the BirdLife Khao Nor Chuchi Lowland Forest project began on 1 September 1995 with funding from DANCED (Danish Co-operation for Environment and Development). The aims include: preventing the clearance of forest and hunting of wildlife, rehabilitating degraded forest, improving the livelihood of villagers through sustainable agroforestry and improving the habitat for flora and fauna,

including Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi*.

A much greater focus is now being given to securing the active participation of the local communities, particularly the rubber growers living inside the national reserve forest. The key problem at Khao Nor Chuchi is that the most extensive areas of lowland forest and most Gurney's Pittas lie outside of the sanctuary. About 30 km² of the land in the Khlong Thom Basin is currently still 70% forested, but supports about 70 households, most of whom are recent settlers. The project is working with these local people to secure a management

consensus, involving the recognition and demarcation of cultivated clearings and promotion of sustainable agroforestry in rubber plantations, in an effort to bring an end to further forest clearance.

SOURCES

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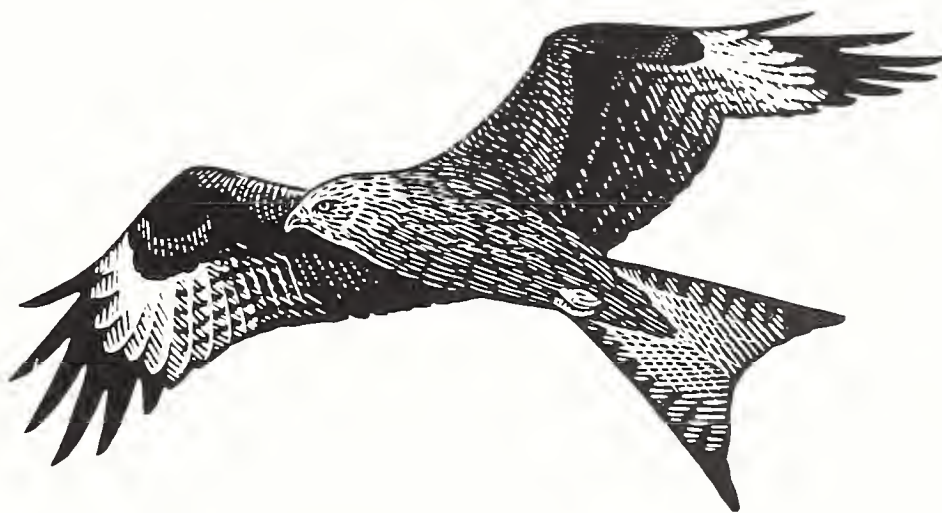
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Erratum

In *Around the Orient*, Bull. OBC 22, Mindoro Hornbill *Penelopides mindorensis* was mentioned as occurring on Panay, in the Philippines. This was an error and should have read Visayan Hornbill *P. panini*.

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The appearance and status of Writhed-billed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* on Panay

New plumage characteristics of Writhed-billed Hornbill are highlighted in this article, which also draws attention to the increasingly precarious status of a bird already critically threatened.

Whilst studying frugivore-forest interactions in the West Visayan islands of Panay and Negros in the Philippines, we focused on the two critically endangered hornbill species, Visayan Hornbill *Penelopides panini* and Writhed-billed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*. Visayan Hornbill is now known certainly only from Panay and Negros, being probably extinct, or nearly so, on Guimaras, Ticao, Masbate, Sicozon and Pan de Azucar. Writhed-billed Hornbill is confined to Panay, Negros and Guimaras, although assumed extinct on the latter¹. During our work in Hamtang Forest, Panay, in May 1995, 25 active hornbill nests were located, 24 of which were established as belonging to Visayan whilst there was only a single nest of Writhed-billed. In addition our nest scouts from the Sulud-Bukidnon people, reported a further six nests to us, which we were unable to verify, that all apparently belonged to Visayan.

Close field observations of five Writhed-billed Hornbills (three males and two females) just prior to breeding, and of one male at a nest hole, plus of two females in captivity, gave us the opportunity to document detailed plumage characteristics. In doing so we noted several details not previously described in the literature.

The three males seen in a fig tree just prior to breeding, and one (possibly one of the same) subsequently tending a brood in a nest hole, were all broadly similar. They showed a dark warm brown iris, a coral red bill and saffron yellow facial skin, with the yellow extending onto the basal third of the red casque (plate 1). The ridges running across the casque appeared to be blackish or dark red, but only numbered 4-5, far less than the number illustrated by Diesmos³. In one male there was a faint tinge of azure blue overlying the yellow face where the bare skin borders the rusty brown feathers of the head; this extended nearly half-way across the face towards the base of the bill and across the bottom of the naked pouch. This feature could not be seen on the nesting male.

The two adult females seen in the field showed two distinct areas of facial skin – a round patch surrounding the eye and beneath it a bean-shaped patch. Where these skin patches bordered the base of the lower mandible, both were of a light saffron, less bright than the male, with an azure blue tinge across both the whole of the upper facial skin patch and the convex lower half of the lower. This combination of yellow and blue shades, although duller, resembled that of the males, but the facial skin area was much smaller and divided into two distinct upper and lower sections. As in the male the bill was coral red, and there were 4-5 grooves across the base of the lower mandible.

This description differs from the published literature in the following ways. Hachisuka⁴ depicts the male as having mossy green facial skin of half the size and an amber iris, whilst Kemp⁵ states that the male has yellow to orange facial skin with red ridges to the casque and lower mandible and that the female has black orbital skin. Blue facial skin is not mentioned for either sex.

The two females from Panay, being kept at the Breeding Centre of the West Visayas State University, Lambunao, were, in July 1994, at one month old, showing the male-like plumage typical of other *Aceros* species (plate 3). Again they demonstrated discrepancies with published accounts, in that the facial skin was white rather than yellow⁵ and the eye white with a wash of grey, rather than yellow-brown⁵. Interestingly the extent of the facial skin was almost as large as that of the adult male, rendering the appearance even more male-like than has been previously described.

By May 1995, at eight months, both birds were developing a facial skin coloration similar to that of a breeding adult female (plate 2). However, the blue was well developed only on the lower patch and the yellow was still absent. The iris was

Writhed-billed Hornbill

Aceros waldeni

1: Male Writhed-billed Hornbill
Aceros waldeni at the nest, Hamtang
Forest Reserve, May 1995
(Photo: A. Hamann)

2: Eight-month-old female
Writhed-billed Hornbill
Aceros waldeni in captivity
(Photo: E. Curio)

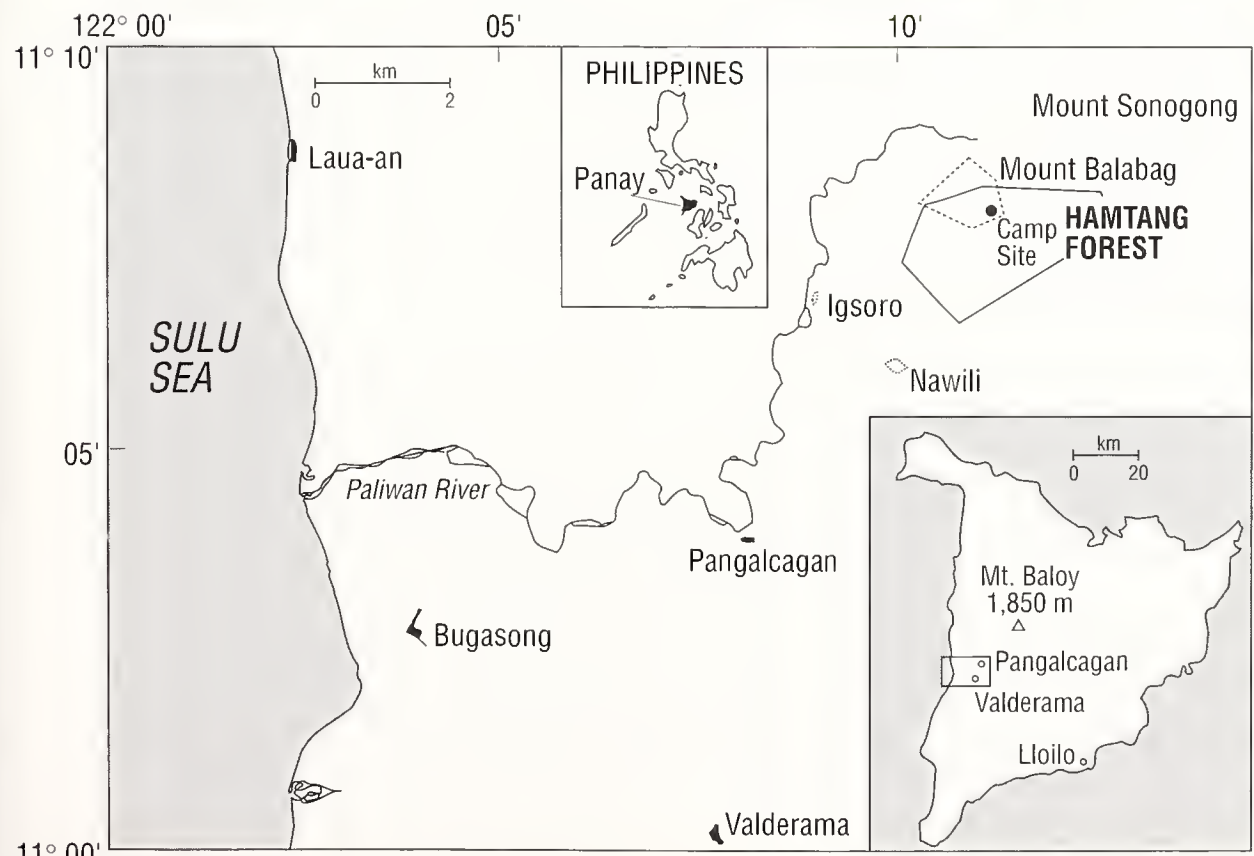
3: One-month-old female
Writhed-billed Hornbills
Aceros waldeni in captivity
(Photo: E. Curio)



2



1



3

Figure 1: Map showing location of study site, Hamtang Forest, Panay.

amber not red brown⁵. Both these birds possessed white rather than rufous tails. It is believed that the rufous colour stems from an oil gland⁵, and it is possible that the oil has not yet attained an adult property, or there is some other condition-dependent factor that prevents the birds from staining the tail properly. A third possibility is that there are birds with either white or rufous tails in the population³. That both birds were still not mature was indicated by the juvenile eye colour and the undeveloped bill grooves. The presence of these two birds at Lambunao will allow detailed study of the colour changes in plumage and bare parts from fledging to maturity.

Writhed-billed were always markedly outnumbered by Visayan, both before (February/March 1995) and after (July 1995) the breeding season. In fact the only congregations of Writhed-billed we observed: were 4-5 regularly visiting a fruit tree in Hamtang Forest, and a post-breeding flock of 25-30 feeding on the ripe fruits of a large babagnun *Alaiga* sp. near Dalagsaan, Aklan Province, the latter being the largest flock of the species ever recorded².

Visayan on the other hand were commonly seen in congregations of 2-3, occasionally up to 8, in upland areas near Mount Baloy, Bugasong-Valderama area, Antique Province. Similar numbers were also reported by Lambert (*in litt.*) near Dalagsaan. The densities (adults per km²) of the two species were estimated to be close to 1.5 for Visayans and 0.04 for Writhed-billed. In captivity on Panay we know of ten Visayans (in two locations) and only 3 Writhed-billed, one in Aklan Province (Lambert *in litt.*) and the two at the Lambunao Breeding Centre. This seems to reflect their relative abundance in the wild. It appears that the status of Writhed-billed Hornbill may be even more precarious on Negros³, and we are therefore deeply concerned by the low numbers of the species we recorded on Panay.

Acknowledgements

This note is publication no. 3 of the Philippine Endemic Species Conservation Project of the Frankfurt Zoological Society, with additional support from the Andreas-Stihl-Stiftung, the EU, the German Ornithologists' Society, the Ministry of Science and Research of the land North Rhine Westfalia, and a generous donation from Prof. Dr Dr mult. h.c. Ernst Mayr, Cambridge, Mass.: The Protected Area and Wildlife Bureau of the DENR (Director Wilfrido S. Pollisco), the Negros Forest and Ecological Foundation (President Mr Gerry Ledesma), the Office of Negros Occ. (Mr Edwin Abanil, Governor Rafael L. Coscoluella), and West Visayas State University (President Dr Bernabe Cocjin) provided advice and support throughout.

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Threatened birds in the eastern Himalayas

The eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area probably supports the highest diversity of birds in the Orient. Information gathering by the ongoing BirdLife Asian Red Data Book Project is highlighting just how little we know about the area's many threatened birds.

The north-east of the Indian subcontinent lies at the crossroads of the Oriental Region. Tropical semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests in the lowlands extend from here south and west into the subcontinent, and east into southern China and South-East Asia. Subtropical forests follow the foothills of the Himalayas to the west and extend into south-east China and northern South-East Asia to the east. In the plains of Assam, the wetlands and grasslands support a distinct group of birds, many of which range to the Gangetic plain in the west and the wetlands and grasslands of South-East Asia in the east. Himalayan temperate and subalpine zone forests extend from northern Pakistan and adjacent Afghanistan through north-east India to south-west China, and at high altitudes alpine habitats support many birds characteristic of the mountains of central Asia. This wealth of habitats is reflected in a wealth of birds, and this area probably supports the highest diversity of bird species in the Orient. It also has one of the largest concentrations of globally threatened birds in Asia. The principal threat is habitat loss, particularly of wetlands and grasslands on the plains, tropical lowland forests, and subtropical and temperate forests in the Himalayas. However, the conservation situation is far from clear. Regional workshops for South Asia and South-East Asia held during 1995 as part of the Asian Red Data Book Project (*Bull. OBC* 21: 64) revealed that there is a general lack of information on the current status of both the birds and their habitats.

The eastern Himalayas have a distinctly different climate (and hence vegetation and avifauna) to the rest of the range, as they lie further to the south and have warmer mean temperatures and fewer days with frost, and generally have a much higher rainfall¹². They extend from the Arun-Kosi valley in eastern Nepal, through Bhutan, north-east India, south-east Tibet and northern Myanmar to north-west Yunnan in China, and are

here taken to include the mountains which extend from Nagaland and Manipur in India south to the Chin Hills in Myanmar and the Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh. These mountains have been identified as an Endemic Bird Area by BirdLife International^{4,16}, which supports 22 restricted-range bird species of which 19 are eastern Himalayan endemics.

There is considerable variation in ornithological coverage within the eastern Himalayas. Eastern Nepal⁵ and Darjeeling (see OBC's Indian Birding Itineraries) are relatively accessible and well known to birders. A major ornithological survey of Bhutan was carried out by Salim Ali and colleagues between 1966 and 1973 (although their full report has yet to be published¹), and several subsequent studies have been carried out^{3,6,7}. Far less information is available from the large, mountainous Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, although recent surveys have been carried out in Namdapha National Park¹³ and other sites in the east of the state⁸, and the observations of Pratap Singh from localities throughout the state are particularly important¹⁴. There appears to have been little recent work on birds in the Indian states of Manipur and Nagaland, and most of Burma (Myanmar) has until recently been inaccessible to birders, although the changing situation there has allowed visits to Mount Victoria and elsewhere (*Bull. OBC* 21: 72; 22: 57-59). There also appears to be little recent published information on Himalayan birds in south-east Tibet, but the work of the Kunming Institute of Zoology and others in the Gaoligongshan region of Yunnan has resulted in important new information^{9,11}.

The magnificent Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*, featured on the front cover of this Bulletin, is a good example of the current state of knowledge of a typical bird of this region. It is endemic to the eastern Himalayas, apart from a disjunct population on Fan-Si-Pan in northern Vietnam, and is found in broadleaf evergreen forest between

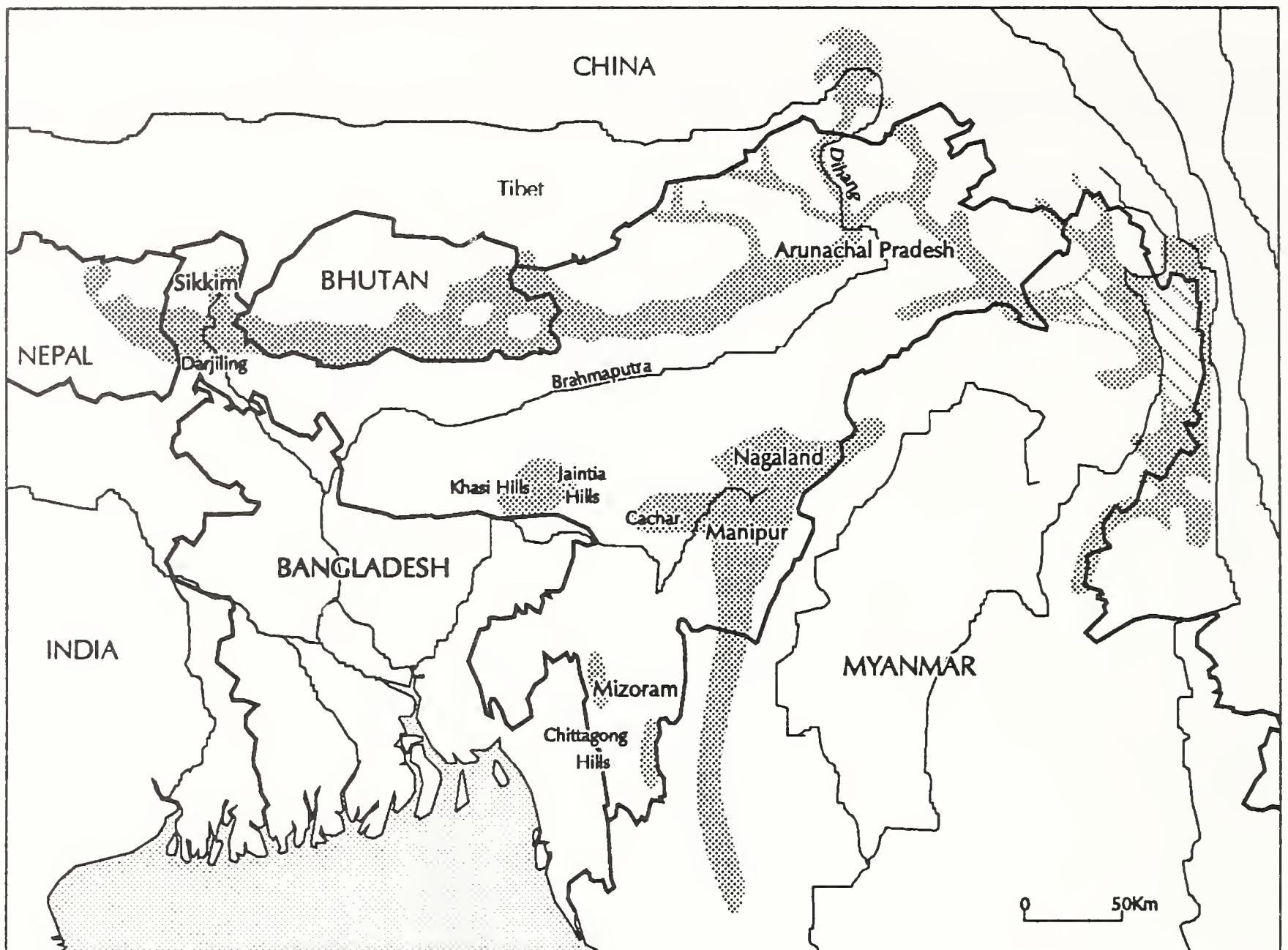


Figure 1: Location of the Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area

1,500 and 3,000 m. It was historically reported to be locally common¹⁵, but the only recent records appear to be of small numbers in eastern Bhutan, (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1994)¹, Arunachal Pradesh¹⁴ and north-west Yunnan¹¹. There is evidence for loss of habitat in parts of its range, but not enough information to assess the impact on its population with any degree of accuracy.

Many parts of the eastern Himalayas have always been difficult to visit for logistical and political reasons, but the development which threatens their habitats and birds is also making new areas accessible. A host of possibilities are available to those wanting to carry out ornithological research there. Little or nothing is known on the breeding and wintering ecology of many species, for example on their seasonal altitudinal movements. Work on vocalisations could lead to some interesting new discoveries or re-evaluations of species limits, as has happened recently in China² and Nepal¹⁰. Some birders have already begun to take advantage of the new possibilities to visit this exciting region. BirdLife International would welcome unpublished records of the candidate threatened species listed in Appendix 1, which will be passed on to Red Data

Book national coordinators in the region, especially if they are from poorly known sites. For conservationists, an important question is whether existing protected areas support populations of the rarer and more localised species, or whether new areas need to be located and protected. The challenge is to understand the ornithological riches of this unique area, and take the measures required for their long-term survival, before they begin to be lost.

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Appendix 1

Candidate threatened species which occur in the eastern Himalayas.

Manipur Bush-quail *Perdica manipurens*
 White-cheeked Partridge *Arborophila atrogularis*
 Chestnut-breasted Partridge *Arborophila mandellii*
 Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*
 Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*
 Sclater's Monal *Lophophorus sclateri*
 Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*
 Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*
 Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*
 Blyth's Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*
 Dark-rumped Swift *Apus acuticauda*
 Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola*
 White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*
 Grey-sided Thrush *Turdus feae*
 Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hypertyra*
 Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*
 White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae*
 Brown-capped Laughingthrush *Garrulax austeni*
 Rufous-throated Wren-babbler *Spelaornis caudatus*
 Rusty-throated Wren-babbler *Spelaornis badeigularis*
 Tawny-breasted Wren-babbler *Spelaornis longicaudatus*
 Snowy-throated Babbler *Stachyris oglei*
 Black-breasted Parrotbill *Paradoxornis flavirostris*
 Black-browed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis atrosuperciliaris*
 Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*



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Birdwatching areas

Chiang Saen, northern Thailand



Waders inhabiting the bed of the great Mekong River, Jerdon's Bushchat along the river bank, waterfowl on nearby lakes, plus surrounding hillocks and rice paddies, make the ancient town of Chiang Saen one of northern Thailand's most interesting birdwatching destinations.

The small ancient town of Chiang Saen, located on the Mekong River in Chiang Rai Province northern Thailand, where the borders of Laos and Myanmar meet, is a pleasant base from which to explore riverine habitats and a couple of lakes nearby. The area is best visited in mid to late winter when the lakes can hold thousands of duck, although duck numbers fall rapidly after the end of January. Birds in the area include the globally threatened Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, and the near-threatened Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* and Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni*.

To the west of the town, several small tracks lead from the road through a narrow strip of cultivated land to the river bank. Falling river levels in late winter expose broad expanses of gravel and sand, and by walking along the riverbed large numbers of waders can be found around the various remaining small pools. Typical species include Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Common Greenshank *T. nebularia*, Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus*, Temminck's Stint *Calidris*

temminckii, as well as a few Citrine Wagtails *Motacilla citreola* among numerous White Wagtails *M. alba*. Flocks of Little Pratincoles *Glareola lactea* and small numbers of River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* rest on the open sandy bars. It is worth checking through the groups of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* on the gravel areas for the occasional Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus* and also Long-billed Plover; in some winters the latter have been seen in good numbers, whereas in others they seem to be virtually absent. In the past, both River *Sterna aurantia* and Black-bellied Tern *S. acuticauda* occurred here, and the latter has recently been recorded again as a vagrant. Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* has also recently been recorded.

Although there is probably too much disturbance along the river, from local people fishing, washing clothes and digging gravel, for wildfowl to stay long, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* put in the occasional appearance, Common Shelduck *T. tadorna* has been recorded and this part of the river is one of the few regular sites in Thailand for Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*. However, in winter 1995-1996 there was an exceptional series of records of wildfowl, resulting in five Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, a second record for Thailand, and 12 Greylag Geese *A. anser* and a probable Swan Goose *A. cygnoides* – both, if accepted, first records for Thailand (Uthai Treesucon *in litt.*). Interesting passerines can also be seen here, with Plain Martins *Riparia paludicola* hawking along the river, whilst Yellow-bellied Prinias *Prinia flaviventris* and Dusky Warblers *Phylloscopus fuscatus* are common in the tall 'pampas type' grass stands on top of the river banks. Small numbers of Jerdon's Bushchats are regularly encountered along this strip of grass, and in the evening it is used as a roost by several hundred Crested *Melophus lathami*, Little *Emberiza pusilla* and a few Black-



Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* by Kamol Komolphalin



Figure 2: Sign showing Nong Bong Khai Chiang Saen Lake Non-Hunting Area (Photo: Colin Poole)

headed Buntings *E. spodocephala*. Pied Kingfishers *Ceryle rudis* can be seen and Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* has been recorded in the past.

Although the lakes to the south of the town can be reached by taxi or on foot, the easiest way to reach and explore them is by bicycle, which can be readily hired from the various guesthouses in town. The turn-off to the first small lake is 3 km south of the town along the road to Chiang Rai. Just after the 3 km post, you cross a small bridge and there is a road off to the left, indicated by a sign in Thai with a painting of a lake on it. One kilometre down this road, you will reach a small lake.

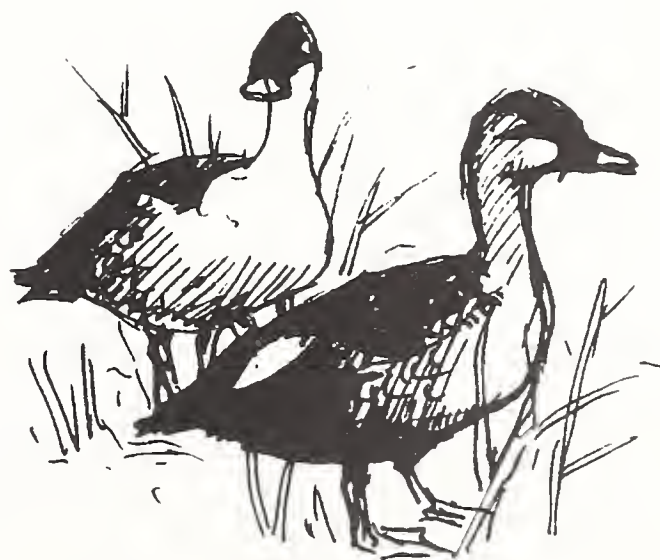
The lake is known in Thai as *Nong Klab* and has been declared a non-hunting area. The birds can be easily watched from a track that runs right around the lake. Regular species include Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Northern Pintail *A. acuta*, Northern Shoveler *A. clypeata*, Garganey *A. querquedula*, Green-winged Teal *A. crecca* and Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, with small numbers of Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and Baer's Pochard; the latter are probably regular here. Unfortunately it appears that as of January 1996, development occurring around this lake has rendered it no longer so good for wildfowl (Uthai Treesucon *in litt.*).

The second lake is far larger and a telescope is essential to view the wildfowl. This lake is about 1 km along a track off to the left, about 6 km out of Chiang Saen, signposted to 'Chiang Saen Lake Camping'. Known in Thai as *Nong Bong Khai*, it has also been protected as part of the same non-hunting area since 1985. Various dusty cycle tracks run right around the lake shore. In mid-



Figure 1: Diagrammatic map of Chiang Saen area

winter, there are thousands of ducks here, chiefly Lesser Whistling-Duck, with a selection of the species mentioned above. In January 1996 the east side of the lake was the best for waterbirds, and 14 species of wildfowl were recorded, including Falcated Teal *Anas falcata*, Spot-billed Duck, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Baer's Pochard and a single Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, the



Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha*, Mekong River, Chiang Saen by Kamol Komolphalin

second record for Thailand (Uthai Treesucon *in litt.*). Other birds to keep an eye out for in the vicinity of the lakes, the fringing marsh and nearby paddy fields are Pheasant-tailed *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* and Bronze-winged Jacanas *Metopidius indicus*, Pintail Snipe, Grey-headed Lapwing *V. cinereus*, Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* and, in the drier areas, Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*.

It is also well worth spending a few hours looking around the scrubby margins of the lakes, paddies and small hillocks around the town. Racket-tailed Treepies *Crypsirina temia* are resident, while wintering migrants regularly found here include Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*, Bluethroat *L. svecica*, Manchurian Bush-Warbler *Cettia canturians*, Spotted Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus thoracicus*, Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon*, Dusky Warbler and Black-faced Buntings, all of which are fairly common. Siberian Blue-Robin *L. cyane* has been recorded on passage.

Chiang Saen is well served by frequent buses from Chiang Rai, which leave every 15 minutes and take two hours. Accommodation is available at several basic guest-houses and hotels, either in the town or just west of it near the river. As well as being a good birdwatching area, Chiang Saen has a long and ancient history, there are numerous old temples and ruins all around the town, and also an excellent and informative local museum.

Phil Heath, 73 Cozens Road, Norwich NR1 1JP, UK.



Garganeys *Anas querquedula*, Chiang Saen by Kamol Komolphalin

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4

Birdwatching Areas - Chiang Saen

1: River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*
(Photo: Gertrud and Helmut Denzau)

2: Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus*
(Photo: John Holmes)

3: Sandbars on the Mekong River, Chiang Saen,
looking towards Laos
(Photo: Colin Poole)

4: Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea*
(Photo: Joanna van Gruisen)

5: Grey-headed Lapwings *Vanellus cinereus*
(Photo: Tim Loseby)

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Club Watch



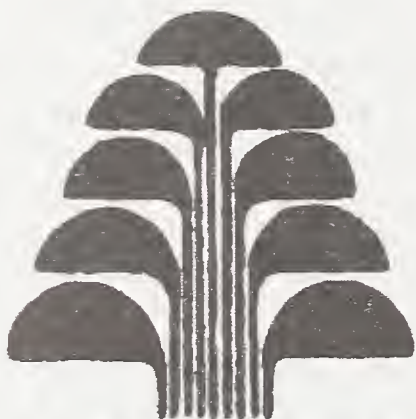
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Known as Haribon for short, the name refers to the Great Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* (*Haring Ibon* - 'the king of birds'), and the organisation has its roots as a birdwatching society. The name has been retained despite the broadening of the mission, because the critical status of the Great Philippine Eagle symbolizes the environmental state of the country.

Haribon runs five major programmes. The Science and Research Development Programme conducts research into the status of the environment, the issues and possible solutions. The Community Organising Development Program (CODP) runs pilot projects with local communities in, for example, the management of protected areas and marine fishery replenishment. Tanggol-Kalikasan provides defense for victims of environmental law violations and para-legal training for local communities, and conducts research and advocacy into legislative issues. The Membership and Chapter Development programme focuses on the recruitment, retention and awareness building of individuals and chapters. Finally, Special Programmes, wherein special arrangements with international partners are accommodated.

Haribon is also the BirdLife Partner for the Philippines, and included under Special Programmes is the BirdLife Philippines Programme. Currently this is primarily involved in undertaking the Important Bird Areas (IBA) and the Philippine Red Data Book Projects. In the future, Haribon plans to contribute more to biodiversity conservation, primarily through provision of information on IBAs, protected areas and species diversity, by publishing a Red Data Book for the birds of the Philippines and by starting a wildlife club for individuals.

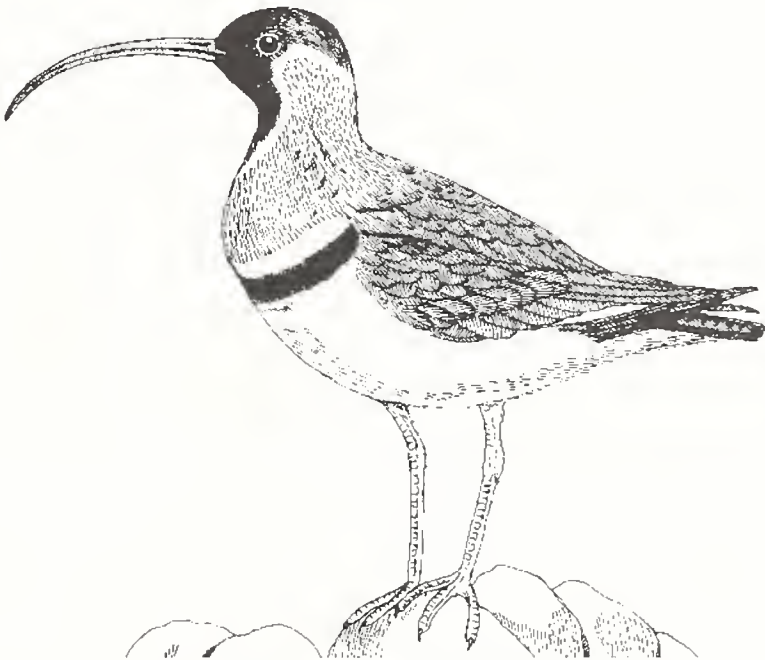
More generally, a major strategy is to improve the membership base. A key need is seen to be to increase the number and quality of people working in conservation, and Haribon aims to build local capacity to do this. The organisation has a particular bias towards enabling local communities to undertake culturally compatible conservation activities themselves, based on sound scientific information. Haribon also hopes to bring its over 20 years of experience to assist in the implementation of initiatives such as the Global Environment Facility funded National Integrated Protected Area Project, and the Philippines' adherence to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Winter waterfowl count in Namdapha National Park

Namdapha National Park is a little known but very important protected area in Arunachal Pradesh, this article details the first mid-winter waterfowl count carried out in the park and the interesting species recorded.

Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, covers an area of 1,985 km² in the basin of the Noa-Dihing River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. The altitude of Namdapha ranges from 200 m near M'Pen to 4,500 m at Dapha Bum, and the habitat from tropical rainforest to sub-tropical evergreen and temperate alpine forest. Because of the hilly terrain, the area is rich in hill and forest birds; however, a few waterfowl are met with along the Noa-Dihing River and some of its tributaries such as the Deban and the Namdapha. Although some works on its birds are available^{1,2,3}, Namdapha National Park had never been covered in the International Mid-winter Waterfowl Census.

To put Namdapha on the 'waterfowl count map', I made a day's visit on 16 January 1993. As expected in foothill country, with bouldery rivers and streams, the number of waterfowl was not particularly significant (see Appendix 1), but a few important and interesting observations were made. These include Ibisbill, Great Black-headed Gull and White-bellied Heron.



Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*, Namdapha National Park
by Anwaruddin Choudhury

A lone Ibisbill was located amongst the boulders of the Noa-Dihing River, near its confluence with the Deban River, just north of Deban. This constitutes the first record of the species on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, as it was previously known only from the north bank.

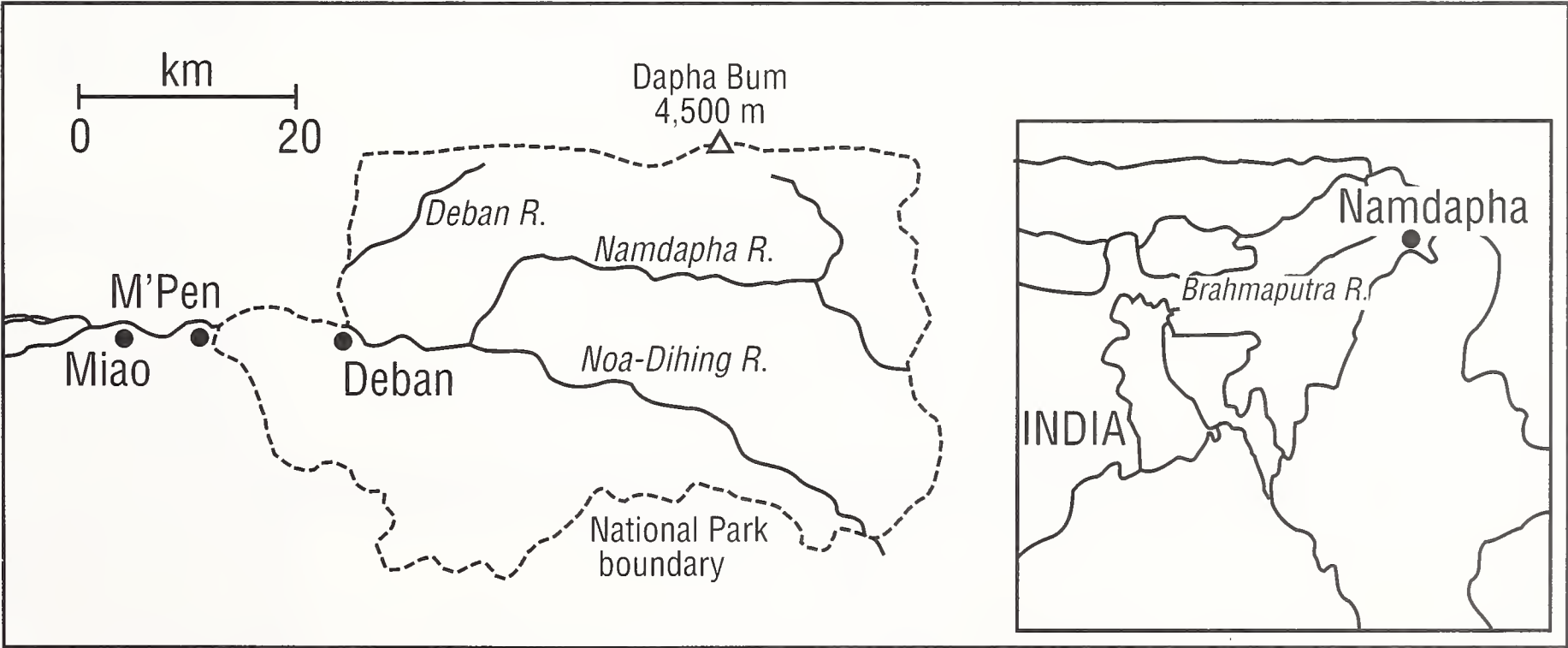


Figure 1: Map showing location of Namdapha National Park and count sites.

One adult and one immature Great Black-headed Gull were seen in flight along the Noa-Dihing River. This is only the second record for Arunachal Pradesh, the first being birds I recorded in D'Ering (Lali) Wildlife Sanctuary in March 1991.

Finally, I was very fortunate to see a White-bellied Heron. I watched the bird fly by with slow wing-beats and settle in a densely forested hill slope. I was unable to ascertain whether it settled in a tree or at a *nullah* (hill stream). This is the first record not only for Namdapha but for the whole of Arunachal Pradesh.

My census covered only a tiny fraction of Namdapha National Park, along the Noa-Dihing River from Deban to M'Pen. Further surveys of other stretches of river and forest pools would undoubtedly record more waterfowl. It is interesting to note that the park is also a known locality for White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*.

Anwaruddin Choudhury, Near Gate 1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road, Guwahati 781007, Assam, India.

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Appendix 1

Waterfowl recorded along the Noa-Dihing River from Deban to M'Pen, Namdapha National Park (27°30'N 96°20'-96°24'E), 16 January 1993.

Common Merganser <i>Mergus merganser</i>	9
Ibisbill <i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>	1
River Lapwing <i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	2
Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	2
Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	99
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1
White-bellied Heron <i>Ardea insignis</i>	1
Unidentified ducks	1
Unidentified shorebirds	3

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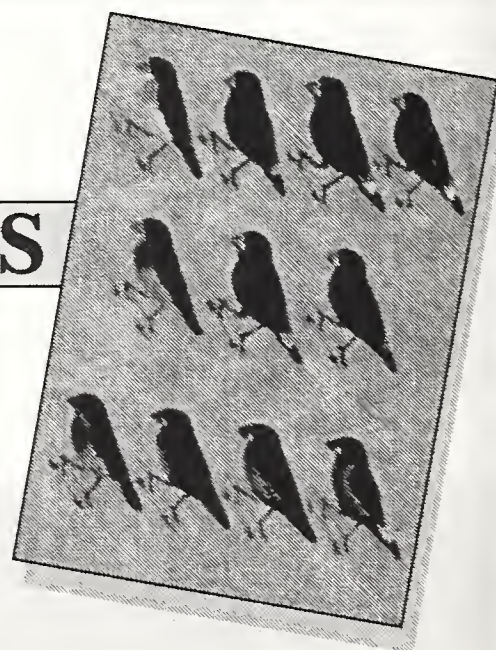
PITTAS, BROADBILLS
AND ASITIES



Frank Lambert and Martin Woodcock

SEALIFE

A Guide to the Marine Environment



Identification of pittas in the ‘*brachyura*’ complex in Asia

Coinciding with the publication of the new Pica Press book *Pittas, Broadbills and Asities* by Frank Lambert and Martin Woodcock, Frank Lambert looks at the identification of one of the region’s more tricky pitta groups.

Introduction

The four species of Asian pitta that share buff underparts and conspicuous blue wing patches - Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Fairy Pitta *P. nympha*, Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis* and Mangrove Pitta *P. megarhyncha* - are clearly closely related species. Historically they have received various different taxonomic treatments, but there is now almost universal recognition of four species, all apparently monotypic. Sibley and Monroe (1992) placed the four species in a ‘*brachyura*’ superspecies group. Although there can now be little doubt that there are indeed four species, the taxonomic relationships between them remain unclear. Differences between the species suggest that they should in fact be divided into two superspecies groups, with Indian and Fairy in one and Blue-winged and Mangrove in the other.

Three of the species overlap in range in South-East Asia, where, at certain times of the year, migratory Blue-winged Pitta can be found in the same areas as resident Mangrove or migratory Fairy Pittas. Indian Pitta is also migratory but has yet to be recorded in South-East Asia, although it is possible that it could occur as a vagrant. In the following account, a brief overview of the distribution, habitat, plumage and voice differences between the four species is given as an aid to identification in the field.

Distribution and habitat

Initial identification of these four species can be narrowed down easily through a knowledge of distribution and usual habitat requirements.

Indian Pitta

Confined to the Indian subcontinent, where it is known as a breeding species in the foothills of the Himalayas, and a winter visitor in southern India and Sri Lanka. Apart from Mangrove Pitta, which

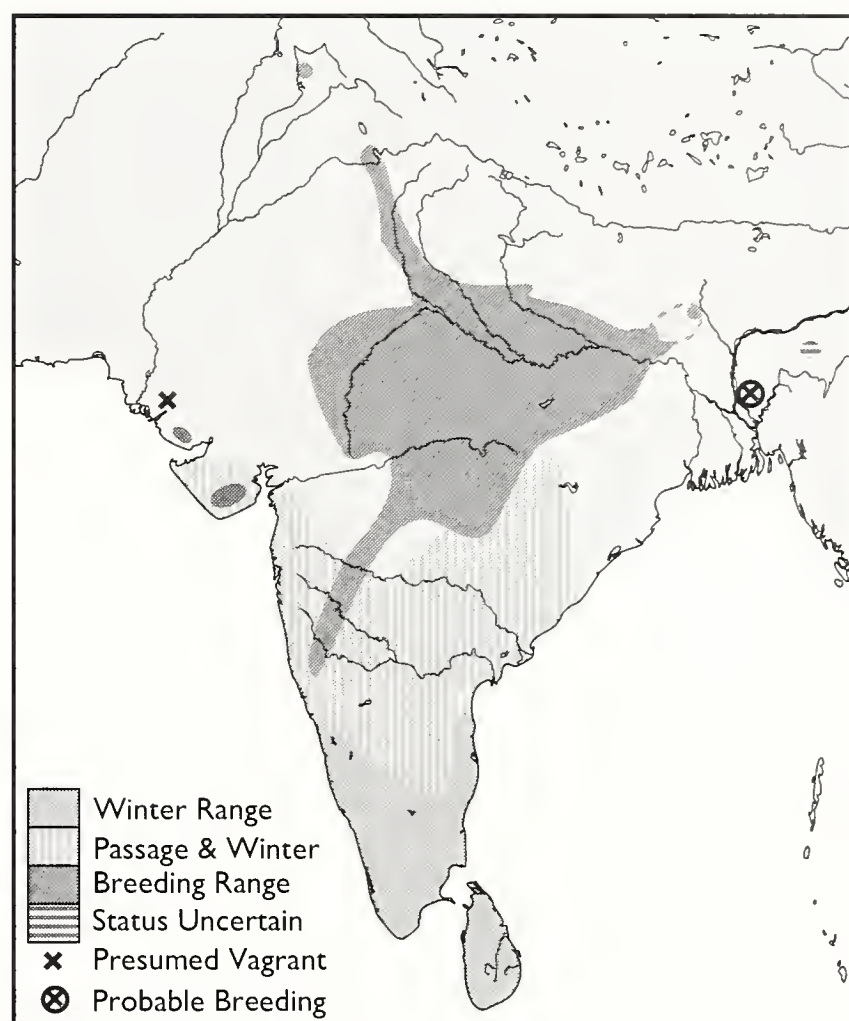


Figure 1: Distribution of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

has been found in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh, no other confusion species is present in the Indian subcontinent.

Fairy Pitta

Known to breed in southern Japan; on Koje Island and the southern slopes of Mt Halla, Cheju Island, both off southern Korea, and perhaps on the South Korean mainland; on Taiwan; and in eastern China south to Kwangsi and Kwangtung. In China, breeding has been confirmed in the provinces of Kwangsi, Anhwei and the mountains of Honan, and there are late April and May records from Kwangtung and Fukian that could refer to breeding birds or migrants. Records from around Shanghai refer to migrants.

During the non-breeding season, Fairy Pitta migrates south through eastern China and

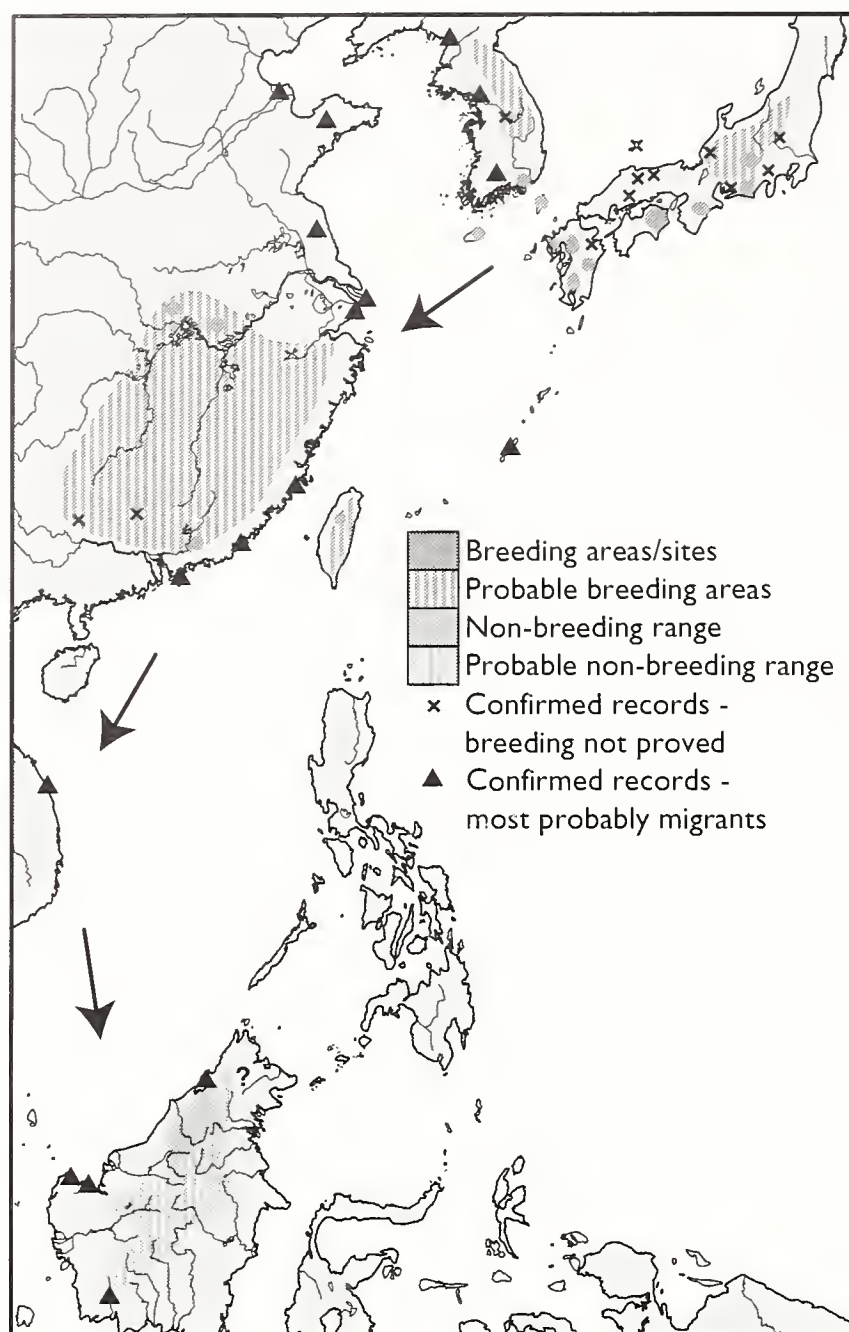


Figure 2: Distribution of Fairy Pitta *Pitta nympha*

Taiwan to winter in Borneo and possibly southern China and Indochina. It has yet to be recorded in the Philippines. The evidence for wintering in southern China is poor, but January and February sightings in Hong Kong, perhaps of the same bird, can most easily be explained by an overwintering individual. Some evidence suggests that the birds wintering in Borneo are from mainland China, and it is possible that those from the more northerly part of the breeding range, in Japan and Korea, might winter in southern China or in Indochina. Fairy Pittas have been encountered several times in central Annam, Vietnam, in April.

Although it has been established that north-west Borneo is an important wintering area for Fairy Pitta, there are few records and it appears to be localised in its non-breeding range. There are no confirmed records from Sabah, only one record from Brunei and the only record from Indonesian Borneo is a specimen from Riam, South Kalimantan. In the 1970s, however, Fairy Pitta was a relatively common bird in Sarawak. Nevertheless, since that time, Fairy Pitta

populations must certainly have declined in China, whilst elsewhere within its breeding range, it is reported to have become very rare. There were, for example, probably less than 20 pairs breeding on the islands off South Korea in 1994, whilst the best-known locality for Fairy Pitta in Japan, Mi-ike, Miyazakiken, holds only around 20 birds in most years. It has been suggested that large-scale bird trapping in the spring on Taiwan has depleted the island's breeding population, and may also have affected migrant populations: at Tseng-Wen reservoir, hundreds of Fairy Pittas were caught each spring during the 1980s, with as many as 200 being caught on a single day.

In Taiwan, Fairy Pittas inhabit central and southern woodlands below 1,300 m. In Japan, they breed in moist deciduous and evergreen forests on low mountain slopes below 500 m, although the species has occasionally been observed at altitudes up to 1,200 m. Within this habitat, they prefer thick understoreys of bushes and ferns, particularly near streams. In Borneo, Fairy Pittas are primarily to be found at higher elevations, including submontane areas, where they inhabit primary forest, being regularly reported from mixed dipterocarp forest on hillsides up to around 1,070 m.

Blue-winged Pitta

This is the species most likely to be confused with Mangrove Pitta, since it sometimes breeds in adjacent habitats and also occurs in mangroves during migration. Usually, however, it is a bird of a wide variety of other wooded habitats. Blue-winged Pitta has a very wide distribution in South-East Asia, being known to breed in southern Yunnan, China; Annam and Cochinchina, Vietnam; Cambodia; Laos; the southern Shan States, Pegu Hills, Karen Hills and south Arakan to Tenasserim, Burma (Myanmar); Thailand; and Perlis and Langkawi Island, northern Peninsular Malaysia. Evidence also suggests that some individuals breed in Borneo. The occurrence of migrants in the Red River delta of Vietnam suggests that Blue-winged Pitta may also breed in Tonkin or in adjacent China, perhaps in Guangxi Province.

During the northern winter, Blue-winged Pitta is found throughout the southern part of the breeding range, but more northerly areas are vacated as the dry season sets in, and birds migrate south to Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and Borneo, with records coming from many

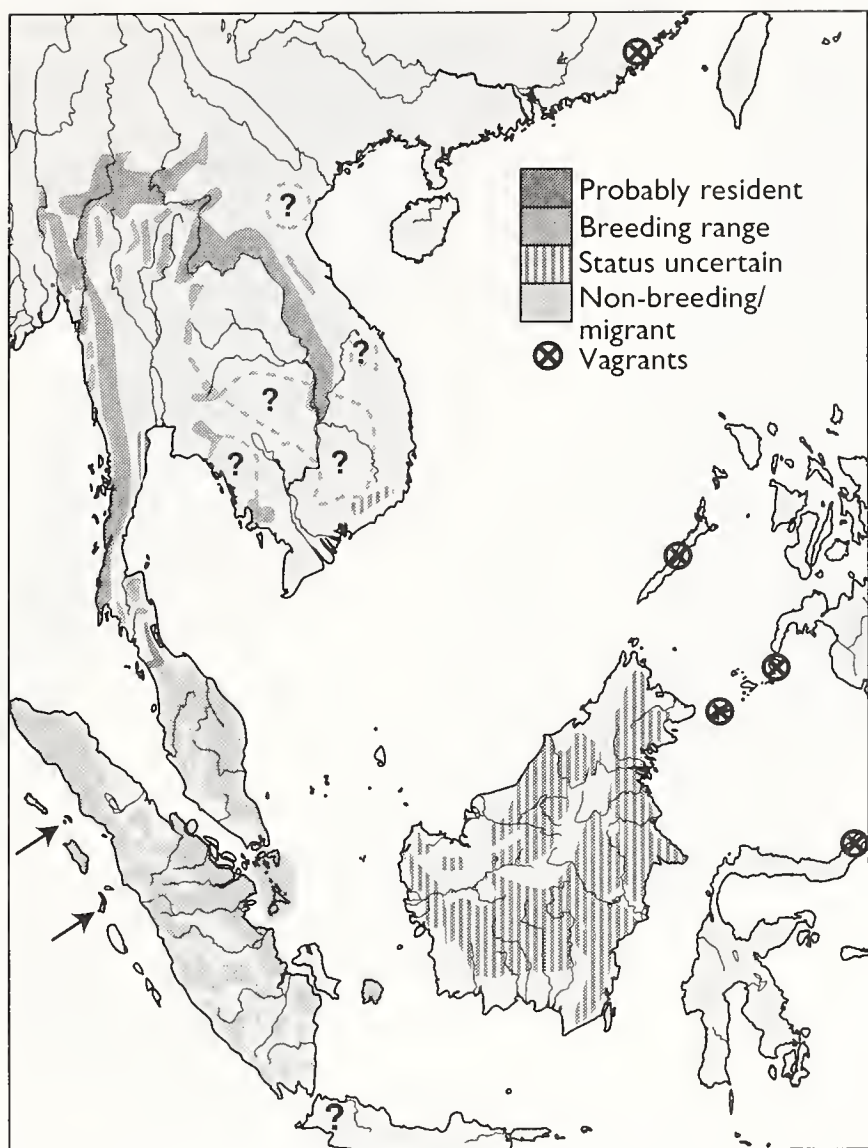


Figure 3: Distribution of Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*

islands in this region. It is possible that some individuals in the northern part of the range may stay on their breeding grounds all year, as birds have been seen in winter in the Pegu Hills of Burma (Myanmar). Vagrants have reached Tawitawi, Basilan and Palawan in the Philippines; north Sulawesi; Christmas Island and north-west Australia, although records from the latter have been questioned. Although Blue-winged Pitta may reach Java during the winter, there are as yet no acceptable records. In its wintering range, Blue-winged Pitta, in contrast to Fairy Pitta, apparently favours secondary forest or forest edge, not usually being encountered in primary forest, and, although it may be found at high altitudes during migration, it usually winters in lowlands and hills.

Mangrove Pitta

As its name suggests, Mangrove Pitta is only certainly known from mangrove forest, so habitat is key to its identification. It ranges from the Sundarbans south along the coast of mainland Asia, to Singapore and Sumatra, and northwards up the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It has also been found in mangroves on many small offshore islands.



Figure 4: Distribution of Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha*

Field Identification

The two superspecies groups form two relatively distinctive species pairs that are superficially very similar. Blue-winged and Mangrove Pittas are medium-sized pittas, whilst Indian and Fairy Pitta are smaller, with Indian Pitta distinctly smaller and Fairy Pitta somewhat intermediate. There is a similar spectrum of bill sizes, with Mangrove having the largest and Indian the smallest.

Indian Pitta

Unlikely to be confused with any other pitta in its range. However, Mangrove and Blue-winged Pittas both occur in areas where vagrant Indian Pittas could potentially occur. These two species are overall larger and darker, with much more extensive violet-blue, rather than azure-blue, wing patches, violet-blue rumps and broad bold buffy supercilia. They also have considerably more white in the wing and a more chestnut-coloured superciliary band. Both lack the small whitish patch below the eye and the white in the supercilium of Indian Pitta. Immature Mangrove and Blue-winged Pittas also have more extensive blue in the wing and are a richer orange-buff below when compared to similar-aged immature Indian Pittas. It should also be noted that immature Hooded Pittas *Pitta sordida*, which may be found in the same areas as breeding Indian Pittas, have black heads with chestnut crown to nape, and a prominent white bar across the wing coverts.

Fairy Pitta

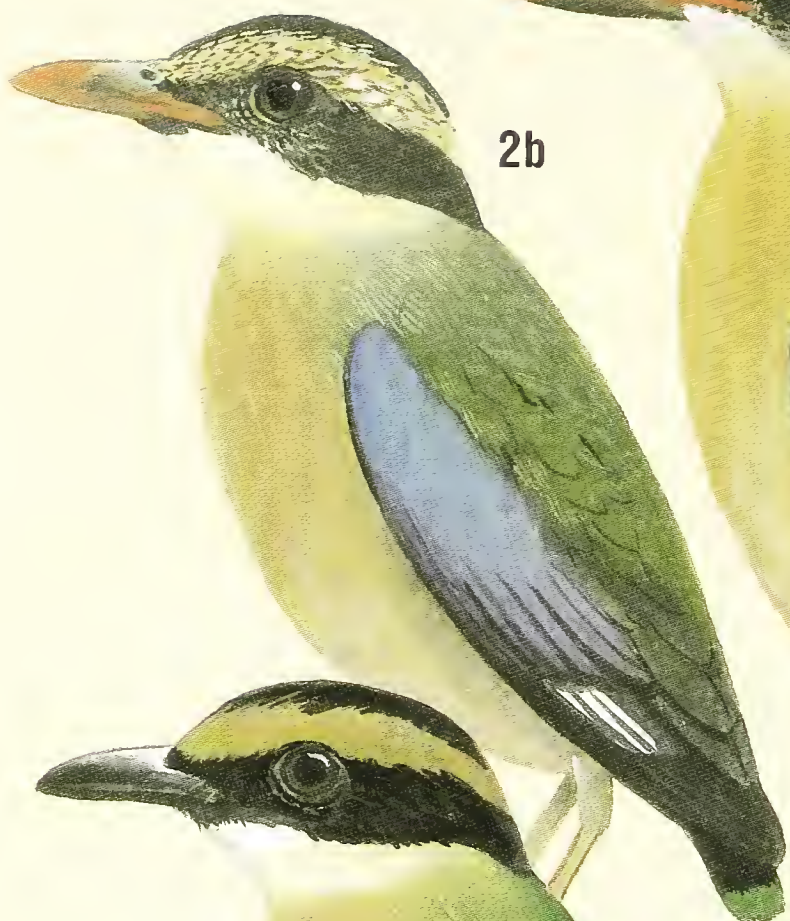
As noted previously, this species may be found within the potential range of Blue-winged Pitta during migration. Fairy Pitta is paler below than



1a



1b



2b



2a



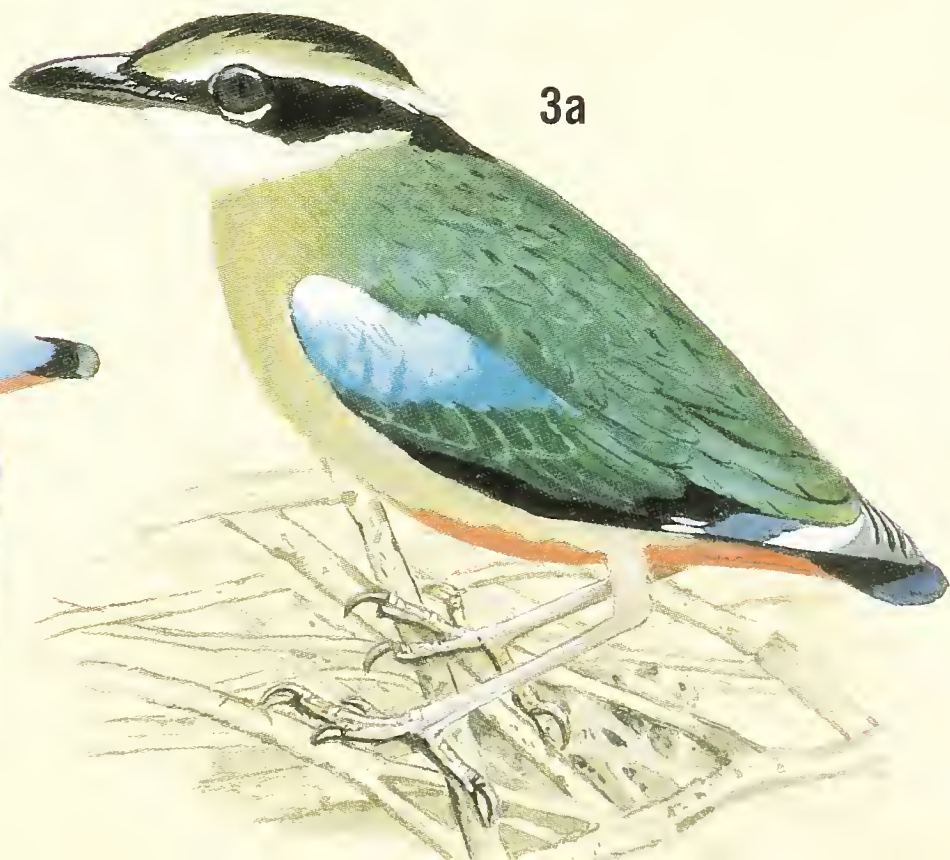
2c



4b



4a



3a



3b

Blue-winged Pitta, has an azure-blue rather than violet-blue wing patch and rump and a more contrasting head pattern. In flight, there is considerably less white in the wing of Fairy than Blue-winged.

Blue-winged Pitta and Mangrove Pitta

Mangrove Pitta is slightly more robust and larger-billed than Blue-winged (bill >38 mm in length, compared with <32.5 mm), although this may be of little value to a first-time observer obtaining a brief view. Head patterns of these two species, however, also differ, with Mangrove Pitta having distinctly less contrast between the lateral coronal bands (darker than those of Blue-winged) and the more uniform, darker brown crown. Blue-winged Pitta has conspicuous buffy or buffy-brown lateral coronal bands that contrast strongly with the rest of the crown. It also has more black in the top of the crown than Mangrove. If views are exceptionally good, the black chin of Blue-winged Pitta is diagnostic (white in Mangrove). Immature Mangrove Pitta is very similar to immature Blue-winged Pitta, but, like the adult it has a notably larger bill, white chin and the entire crown is brown with variable rufous tones (depending on age) and dark edges to the feathers, giving a scaly appearance.

Voice

Calls of the four species in this group are all distinctive, and can be used to separate potentially sympatric species.

Indian Pitta

Quite different from the other species, being a clear short double whistle (of monosyllabic notes), *wheet-tieu* or *wieet-pyou*, or occasionally, a triple note *hh-wit-wiyu*. Calling at dawn and dusk also occurs on the wintering grounds, and the Tamil name translates as the 'six-o'clock bird'. In Sri

Lanka, Drongos *Dicrurus* sp. and Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons* may imitate the call of Indian Pitta, and it is possible that such species may also imitate the calls of other pittas in other parts of their range.

Fairy Pitta.

A clear double whistle, comprising two disyllabic notes: *kwah-he kwa-wu*. Similar to that of Blue-winged Pitta, but it notably longer and slower.

Blue-winged Pitta

A loud, clear, fluty double-whistle *taelaew-taelaew* or *taewu-taewu*, with a distinctive disyllabic quality to both parts ('*tae-laew*') of the call. The entire call lasts less than a second. A second call, given in alarm, is a harsh *skyeew*. Calling is rather seasonal, occurring mostly during the breeding season. During the non-breeding season, birds are usually silent except at dawn and dusk, when they may occasionally call, sometimes from their roosts.

Mangrove Pitta

Also loud and fluty, lasting less than a second. The notes, best described as *hhwa-hwa*, are however more even, with no suggestion of the disyllabic quality of Blue-winged Pitta. The first note rises, but the second is fairly even. At a distance, the call may sound more like the *tae-laew* of Blue-winged Pitta but, unlike the latter, is not given in couplets, so each *tae-laew* phrase is separated from the next by a distinctive pause that may last 3-4 seconds. The call is usually made from the canopy or tree-tops, but, unexpectedly, this species has also been heard calling from within its nest.

Conclusion

Although these four species of pitta are often easy to observe on their breeding grounds, particularly when calling, the three species found in South-East Asia during the northern winter are often silent and difficult to see well. Under these circumstances, prior knowledge of the differences to look for is critical, since they tend to disappear without trace once disturbed. It is useful to bear in mind, however, that at least two species in this group, Indian and Blue-winged Pitta, are apparently territorial on their wintering grounds, so that patience may often pay dividends if one waits or revisits the exact area where a 'brachyura' complex pitta was glimpsed.

Frank Lambert, c/o 15 Bramble Rise, Brighton BN1 5GE, UK.

Pitta Plate

by Martin Woodcock from *Pittas, Broadbills and Asities* by Frank Lambert and Martin Woodcock published by Pica Press.

1. Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhynchus*
1a. Adult. 1b. Immature.
2. Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*
2a. Adult. 2b. Immature. 2c. Adult in flight
3. Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*
3a. Adult. 3b. Adult in flight
4. Fairy Pitta *Pitta nympha*
4a. Adult. 4b. Adult in flight



1



3



4



'Brachyura' Pittas

1: Fairy Pitta *Pitta nympha*
(Photo: Kimura Tsutomu)

2: Fairy Pitta *Pitta nympha*
(Photo: Peter Kennerley)

3: Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*
(Photo: Simon Harrap)

4: Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*
(Photo: Pete Morris)

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5



6



7



8



- 5: Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*
(Photo: Chew Yen Fook).
Taken from *A Photographic Guide to the
Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore*
published by New Holland.
- 6: Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*
(Photo: Colin Poole)
- 7: Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha*
(Photo: Richard Gregory-Smith)
- 8: Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha*
(Photo: Allen Jeyarajasingam)

The status of the birds of Ursula Island, Palawan, Philippines

Ursula is a small island of less than 17 ha off southern Palawan in the Philippines. During a 1994 field trip to the island, four species not previously recorded on Ursula were observed, bringing the total number of bird species recorded there to 40.

Ursula Island lies approximately 20 km off Brooke's Point, southern Palawan, about one hour by boat from Rio Tuba. It was established as a bird sanctuary on 30 April 1960 to preserve large numbers of nesting and roosting pigeons⁸.

The vegetation of Ursula is composed of old growth forest, dominated by tree species such as Ipil *Intsia bijuga*, Kalantas *Toona calantas*, Dao *Dracontomelon dao*, Amugis *Koordesiodendron pinnatum*, Dapdap *Erythrina variegata*, Nato *Palaquium* sp. and Balete *Ficus* sp., reaching heights of 25 m. Light gaps made from tree falls are numerous and climbers and epiphytes such as *Vanda lamellata* are abundant. Undergrowth is moderate, consisting mostly of saplings and seedlings of the dominant tree species. Giant *Pandanus Pandanus* sp., and creeping vines *Ipomea* sp. dominate the forest edge and beach vegetation.

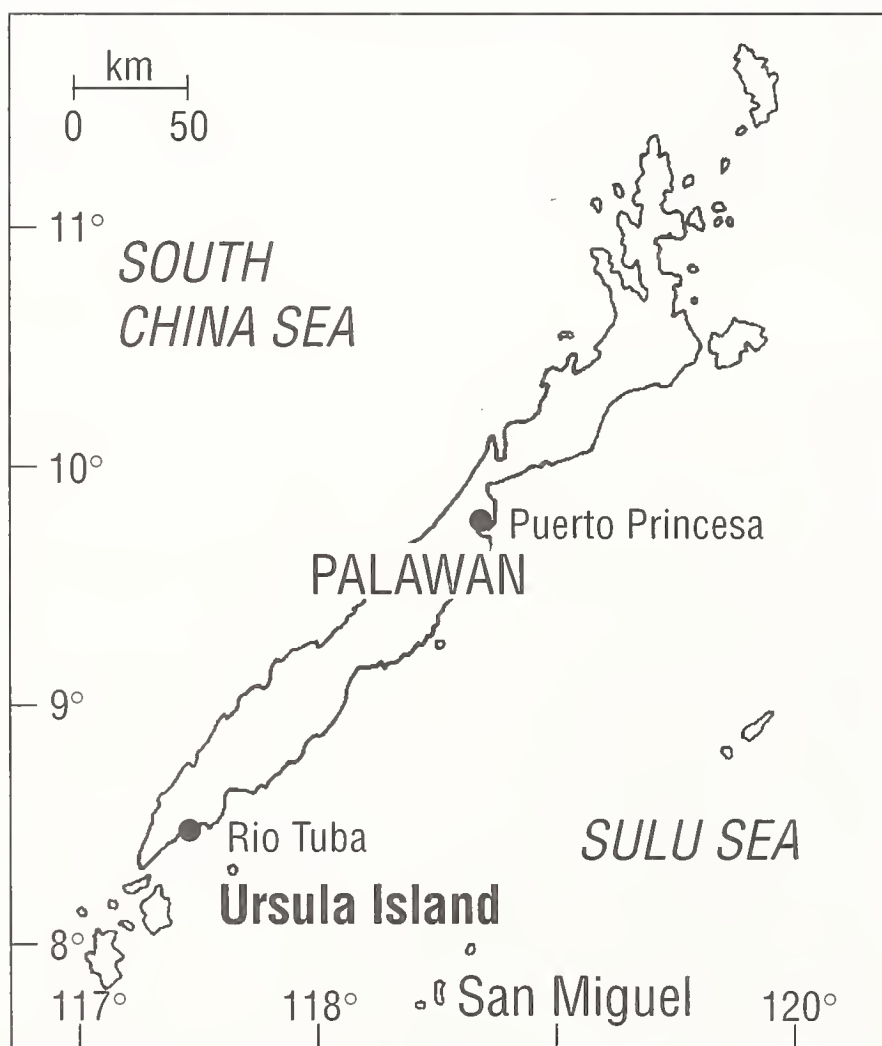


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Ursula Island and Palawan.

History of birds recorded on Ursula

A number of collectors and ornithologists have visited Palawan and its adjacent islands, but only a few have been able to visit Ursula. The first documented visits were in 1936 and 1937 by C. Manuel, who made notes on the status of Nicobar Pigeon, Grey Imperial-Pigeon and Pied Imperial-Pigeon^{6,7}. Tupas in 1972 published an article describing the status of birds on the island, particularly that of the Pied Imperial-Pigeon⁸. In 1973 P. O. and E. J. Glass made an unpublished synopsis of the birds of the island that noted the occurrence of Mantanani Scops-Owl⁴. Later, Bruce observed 22 species of bird during his visit to the island in December 1980^{1,2}. Some notable sight records were made by Kennedy in 1982 as part of his expedition to the small islands around Palawan and the Sulu Sea, and he listed 17 species recorded on Ursula⁴. More recently, following a long period with an absence of records, despite the fact that the island was visited on several occasions (CENRO, verb.), Evans, Dutson and Brooks made observations of birds on Ursula in 1992. They noted only five species on the island, although two of these were new, including Barred Rail⁵.

Observations in 1994

Our observations were made during a brief one-day field trip to Ursula following a seminar-workshop on the conservation of seabirds and other marine life of the Sulu Sea in July 1994. Although in such a brief visit it was not possible to make an accurate assessment of the current status of birds on the island, we noted 26 species, four of which had not previously been recorded, and a further three— a flowerpecker *Dicaeum* sp., a white-eye *Zosterops* sp., and a leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus* sp. — were observed but not identified with certainty.

Ursula is clearly still an important area for roosting and nesting Imperial-Pigeons and during



1



3

Ursula Island

1: Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica*

(Photo: Chew Yen Fook).

2: Pied Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*

(Photo: Chew Yen Fook).

Both taken from *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore* published by New Holland.

3: Malaysian Plovers *Charadrius peronii*

(Photo: Morten Strange, Flying Colours Photography)

4: Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris*

(Photo: Juan Carlos T. Gonzalez)

2



4



our visit proof of breeding was established from a Pied Imperial-Pigeon chick which we found fallen from its nest. The island also continues to be an important breeding ground for Tabon Scrubfowl, and a large nest mound composed of sandy soil and dried vegetation was located on the eastern side. The shoreline is an important migratory and wintering ground for shorebirds and the surrounding waters are valuable feeding grounds for seabirds, particularly terns.

A total of 40 species has now been recorded from Ursula Island (see Table 1). Eight species are migrants, mainly shorebirds, and there are a further eight species of seabirds, the majority being terns. Twenty-four species are resident, although none of these is endemic. The island harbours one globally threatened species, Grey Imperial-Pigeon, and three near-threatened species, Tabon Scrubfowl, Nicobar Pigeon and Malaysian Plover⁴, and in addition supports breeding marine turtles, making Ursula an important wildlife refuge.

Conservation Status

The island is regularly used by fishermen and there are numerous small trails leading to wells dug in the interior. We saw some nipa huts on the leeward side, presumably erected by fishermen. Some of these fishermen fish by using cyanide on the reefs surrounding the island. In the past Tupas noted that hunters seasonally visit the island⁸. Ursula has also been promoted in the past as an ecotourism destination and the degree of disturbance from such tourism has not been fully documented.

It is clear is that there has been a significant decline in the numbers of roosting pigeons using Ursula, from an estimated 150,000 to a few thousand birds over the last 60 years². We also noted a reduction in the number of nesting pairs of imperial-pigeons, with less than 50 pairs being observed during our visit. However, we could not obtain an accurate estimate of the number of pigeons currently using the island, as we were unable to stay and count the birds coming to roost.

Natural predators on Ursula such as the Lined Slender Arboreal Snake *Dendrolaphis caudolineatus* may have had a significant impact on the populations of nesting birds. This is the only species of snake recorded on Ursula and it is possible that it is only a recent coloniser of the island, perhaps brought there by man. The Variable Malay Monitor Lizard *Varanus salvator*

Tabon Scrubfowl <i>Megapodius cumingii</i>	R
Collared Kingfisher <i>Todirhampus chloris</i>	R
Edible-nest Swiftlet <i>Collocalia fuciphaga</i>	R
Fork-tailed Swift <i>Apus pacificus</i>	M
Mantanani Scops-Owl <i>Otus mantananensis</i>	R
Nicobar Pigeon <i>Caloenas nicobarica</i>	R
Black-naped Fruit-Dove <i>Ptilinopus melanospila</i>	R
Green Imperial-Pigeon <i>Ducula aenea</i>	R
Grey Imperial-Pigeon <i>Ducula pickeringii</i>	R
Pied Imperial-Pigeon <i>Ducula bicolor</i>	R
Barred Rail <i>Gallirallus torquatus</i>	R
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	M/R
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	M
Malaysian Plover <i>Charadrius peronii</i>	R
Mongolian Plover <i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	M
Common Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	S
Greater Crested-Tern <i>Sterna bergii</i>	S
Black-naped Tern <i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	S
Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	S
Sooty Tern <i>Sterna fuscata</i>	S
Brown Noddy <i>Anous minutus</i>	S
White-bellied Fish-Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	R
Pacific Reef-Egret <i>Egretta sacra</i>	R
Great Frigatebird <i>Fregata minor</i>	S
Lesser Frigatebird <i>Fregata ariel</i>	S
Wedge-tailed Shearwater <i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	S
Brown Shrike <i>Lanius cristatus</i>	M
Black-naped Oriole <i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	R
White-breasted Woodswallow <i>Artamus leucorhynchos</i>	R
Pied Triller <i>Lalage nigra</i>	R
Pied Fantail <i>Rhipidura javanica</i>	R
Hair-crested Drongo <i>Dicrurus hottentotus</i>	R
Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	R
Asian Glossy Starling <i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	R
Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	M
Pacific Swallow <i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	R
Arctic Warbler <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	M
Plain-throated Sunbird <i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>	R
Purple-throated Sunbird <i>Nectarinia sperata</i>	R
Olive-backed Sunbird <i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>	R

Table 1: Birds recorded from Ursula Island, Palawan, Philippines.
Key: R - resident; M - migrant; S - seabird.

may prey on the eggs and young of ground-nesting birds such as the Tabon Scrubfowl or on pigeon chicks which fall from the nest. There are reports of the introduction of rats, and these are very likely to cause further problems.

Ursula Island is a fragile ecosystem needing careful protection. As such it is recommended that it should be safeguarded against disturbance by

poachers and hunters, cyanide fishing in the surrounding waters should be curbed, further degradation of the remaining forest habitat prevented and steps taken to minimise any risk of pollution caused by campers and tourists. The local government of Palawan should be urged to include Ursula Island in their comprehensive plan to protect and conserve the natural resources of the province.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the following for their important contributions to this paper: The Haribon Foundation and BirdLife International Philippines Program for their invitation to the seminar-workshop on the conservation of seabirds and other marine life of the Sulu Sea; the workshop participants, namely Aldrin Mallari, Blas Tabaranza Jr., Arne Jensen, Nancy Dwyer, Arturo Manamtam and Nina Ingle for allowing access to their field notes; the office of CENRO in Brooke's Point, Palawan; the Wildlife Biology Laboratory Library and the Wildlife Collection of Dr D. S. Rabor; and finally, a special thanks to Prof. Andres Dans and the staff of the Wildlife Biology Laboratory.

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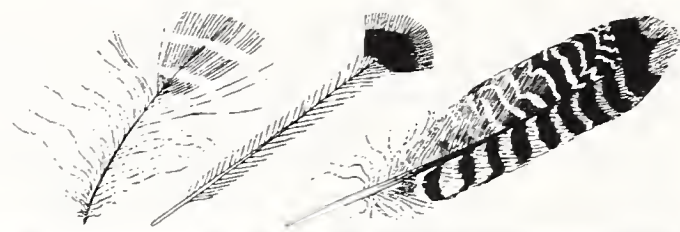
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Stray feathers



Java and Bali Birds - Final Request for Information

In connection with a checklist of the birds of Java and Bali, to be published as part of the series of British Ornithologists' Union checklists. The publication will be a useful contact point for sightings that might otherwise go undocumented. Any information is welcome and all records will, of course, be fully acknowledged. All those who have new or interesting observations from these islands (especially recent observations from little-known areas), are invited to send their information to the compiler, Dr J. H. Becking, Ercalaan 7, 6703 EM Wageningen, The Netherlands.

BirdLife Asia and Pan-Asian Ornithological Conferences

The BirdLife Asia and Pan-Asian Ornithological Conferences are to be held in conjunction from the 9 - 12 November and 14 - 17 November 1996 respectively at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India. Organised by the BirdLife Asia Council and the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) as part of the Sálím Ali birth centenary celebrations. Further details from Dr V.S. Vijayan, SACON, Kalampalayam PO, Coimbatore 641 010, Tamil Nadu, India. Tel: +91 422 392273, fax: +91 422 398232. E-mail: centre@sacon.ernet.in

Records Wanted of Short-tailed Starlings in Timor

Richard Noske is compiling records of the Short-tailed Starling *Aplonis minor* in Timor, where it may be migratory. He needs dates and sites only. As many records as possible please. Send to Dr R. Noske, School of Biological Sciences, Northern Territories University, P.O. Box 40146, Casuarina NT 0811, Australia. E-mail: nosker@ntu.edu.au

BBC Filming *The Life of Birds*

David Attenborough's latest series *The Life of Birds* is currently in production. Over the next two years the BBC Natural History Unit team will be aiming to film the most extraordinary bird behaviour throughout the world to build a series which provides a comprehensive view of avian life. In the coming months they hope to be in touch with as many scientists and ornithologists as possible, to track down the most exciting stories and dramatic locations, and the latest developments. If you know of any stunning locations for filming birds or would like to tell them about extraordinary bird behaviour you are studying or have seen please contact: Adam White, Researcher, *The Life of Birds*, BBC Natural History Unit, Broadcasting House, Bristol BS8 2LR, UK. Tel: 0117 973 2211, fax: 0117 946 7384. E-mail: adam.white@bbc.co.uk

Recordings of Cochoas Wanted

Simon Harrap is seeking sound recordings of cochoas for a potential forthcoming article for the OBC Bulletin, particularly Purple Cochoa *Cochoa purpurea*, for which he has no recordings, but also any good quality recordings of Green Cochoa *C. viridis*, Javan Cochoa *C. azurea* or also Black-breasted Fruithunter *Chlamydochaera jefferyi*. Please send any recordings to Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield, Melton Constable, Norfolk NR24 2RP UK.

Information Wanted on House Crows

Colin Ryall is collecting records of House Crow *Corvus splendens* outside the established populations (e.g. Malaysia and Singapore) around the world. In South-East Asia, the species is likely to turn up in coastal areas, particularly ports on shipping routes from India or Malaysia, e.g. along the north-east Sumatran coast. Records should be sent to Colin Ryall, Department of Environmental Management, Farnborough College, Boundary Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 6SB, UK.

Photographs of Pacific Reef-Egret Wanted

Photographs of white-phase Pacific Reef-Egrets *Egretta sacra* are required for an article being prepared for a

forthcoming OBC Bulletin on the identification of Pacific Reef and non-breeding Chinese Egrets *E. eulophotes*. Please send any transparencies to Colin Poole, 10 Russet Close, Hersham, Surrey KT12 4QJ, UK. E-mail: poole@easynet.co.uk

The Sálim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation

The Sálim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation is expected to be one of the most prestigious conservation awards in the world. It is proposed to be awarded to an individual of any nationality for outstanding contribution and achievement in the field of protection, management and conservation of natural resources including population, wildlife, pollution, and hazardous materials control, education, information and legislation. The candidate can be associated with any university, foundation, corporation or other type of organisation in nature conservation activities. The biannual award is of Rs100,000 and a citation. Further details may be obtained from The Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr Sálim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 400023, India. Tel: 2843869 - 2843421, fax: (91-22) 2837615.

Request for Frogmouth Information

A major guide to the nightjars of the world and their allies is in the final stages of preparation and will be published by Pica Press early next year. Some of the least

known species are the Asian frogmouths *Batrachostomus* spp. If any OBC member is willing to contribute information or photographs for any of the Asian species, it will be gratefully received and fully acknowledged in the book. In particular information on habits, food and breeding is lacking for several species. Please contact Nigel Cleere, 25 Bedford Close, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 6SU, UK.

Request for Photographs of Indian Birds of Prey

I am working on a book of "Indian birds of prey" (to be published by OUP India) and welcome perched and flight photographs of the species mentioned below. The photographs should be preferably in colour, although black and white photographs will be accepted if suitable transparencies are not available on certain species. The photographs should be clear, with good contrast and tonal gradation. Requirements for each species: Perched shots (tight close-ups) or perched (half frame) in habitat, photographs depicting behaviour such as mating, on the nest, hunting etc. are also welcome. Lastly, flight shots (close-ups) which adequately give the "jizz" of the particular species in the air with adult or immature plumage clearly visible. The photographers will be duly acknowledged and the name of the photographer should be stamped or embossed on the slide mount. The cost of procuring pictures from photo libraries is too steep and photographers generously providing pictures would therefore receive a free

copy of the book. Photographs which are not chosen will be returned by registered mail to the photographer. The transparencies should be sent by registered mail to Rishad Naoroji, Godrej Bhavan, 4A Home Street, Fort, Bombay 400 031, India.

Photographs depicting behaviour, portraits and flight (unless specifically mentioned) of the following species are required: Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*, Black Baza *A. leucophotes*, Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* (perched), White-bellied Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, White-tailed Eagle *H. albicilla*, Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* (flight), Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Small Serpent Eagle *Spilornis minimus*, Andaman Serpent Eagle *S. elgini*, Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (male and female in flight and perched), Eastern Marsh Harrier *C. spilonotus* (male and female in flight and perched), Northern Harrier *C. cyaneus* (male and female in flight and perched), Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus* (male and female in flight and perched), Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos* (male and female perched), Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* (male and female perched), Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*, Chinese Goshawk *A. soloensis*, Japanese Sparrowhawk *A. gularis*, Besra *A. virgatus*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*, Northern Goshawk *A. gentilis*, White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa*, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

vulpinus, Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus*, Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius*, Eurasian Tawny Eagle *Aquila vindhiana* (flight), Golden Eagle *A. chrysaetos*, Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*, Rufous-bellied Eagle *H. kienerii*, Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens*, Pied Falconet *M. melanoleucus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, Amur Falcon *F. amurensis*, Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*, Merlin *F. columbarius*, Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo*, Oriental Hobby *F. severus*, Saker Falcon *F. cherrug*, Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus peregrinator*, Barbary Falcon *F. pelegrinoides*.

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

This popular publication on Indian birds has been produced since December 1959. It is now a bi-monthly. It contains a good record of Indian birds through the eyes of the amateur. It is edited by Zafar Futehally, 2205 Oakwood, 8th Main, 3rd block, Koramangala, Bangalore 560034. The annual subscription is Rs40. Abroad US\$20 by airmail.

Delhi Bird Club Formed

In view of a growing interest in Delhi, the capital of India, and the need to educate, create awareness and record developments relating to avifauna in Delhi and its environs, an association of enthusiasts have got together to form the Delhi Bird Club. The first activities of the group are to prepare a checklist of the Delhi region, to organise regular bird outings and nature walks, to record happenings and to disseminate information. Those interested in joining the group should contact Ravi Singh, EG 1/6

Garden Estate Vil., Sikandarpur, Khosi Gurgaon, Haryana. Tel: 3326895 (office), 8353553 (home).

Sound Recordings of Nightbirds Needed

Guides to nightjars of the world by Nigel Cleere and David Nursey and to owls of the world by Claus König and Jan Becking are currently being written for the Pica Press series. It is intended to publish sound recordings of as many species as possible on accompanying CDs, and submissions of recordings are now being sought from many contributors. Good recordings of any species are useful, but there are several untaped or rarely recorded species in the Oriental and New Guinea regions for which recordings of any quality are needed.

For the forthcoming nightjars CD, these are: Dulit Frogmouth *Batrachostomus harterti*, Hodgson's Frogmouth *B. hodgsoni*, Short-tailed Frogmouth *B. poliolophus*, Large Owlet-Nightjar *Aegotheles insignis*, New Caledonian Owlet-Nightjar *A. savesi*, Barred Owlet-Nightjar *A. bennettii*, Wallace's Owlet-Nightjar *A. wallacii*, Mountain Owlet-Nightjar *A. albertisii*, Eastern Mountain Owlet-Nightjar *A. archboldi*, Satanic Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, Papuan Nightjar *E. papuensis*, Archbold's Nightjar *E. archboldi*, Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*, Vaurie's Nightjar *C. centralasicus*, Sulawesi Nightjar *C. celebensis*, Bonaparte's Nightjar *C. concretus*, Salvadori's Nightjar *C. pulchellus*.

For the owls CD: White-fronted Scops-Owl *Otus sagittatus*, Andaman Scops-

Owl *O. balli*, Flores Scops-Owl *O. alfredi*, Simalaur Scops-Owl *O. umbra*, Rajah Scops-Owl *O. brookii*, Biak Scops-Owl *O. magicus beccarii*, Palau Scops-Owl *Pyrroglauis podargina*, Blakiston's Fish-Owl *Ketupa blakistoni*, Brown Fish-Owl *K. zeylonensis*, Tawny Fish-Owl *K. flavipes*, Papuan Hawk-Owl *Uroglauis dimorpha*, Rufous Hawk-Owl *Ninox rufa*, Andaman Hawk-Owl *N. affinis*, Mindoro Hawk-Owl *N. philippensis mindorensis*, Mindanao Hawk-Owl *N. spilocephala*, Ochre-bellied Hawk-Owl *N. ochracea*, Jungle Hawk-Owl *N. theomacha*, Speckled Hawk-Owl *N. punctulata*, Admiralty Island Hawk-Owl *N. meeki*, New Ireland Hawk-Owl *N. solomonis*, New Britain Hawk-Owl *N. odiosa*, Solomon Islands Hawk-Owl *N. jacquinoti*, Sichuan Wood-Owl *Strix davidi*, Fearful Owl *Nesasio solomonensis*.

Please send recordings to: Richard Ranft, NSA Wildlife Section, The British Library National Sound Archive, 29 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2AS, UK. Tel: +44 (0)171-412-7402/3, fax: +44 (0)171-412 7441. E-mail: richard.ranft@bl.uk

Would you be Willing to Undertake Line Drawings for Future OBC Bulletins?

The OBC Bulletin Editor is looking for artists who would be willing to undertake commissioned line drawings to illustrate the *Around the Orient*, *Conservation News* and *From the Field* sections of the Bulletin. Anybody able to help is asked to contact the editor at the Club address, including, if applicable, the region or species groups in which their interest or experience lies.

Little-known Oriental bird

Roborovski's Rosefinch* *Kozlowia roborowskii*



Roborovski's Rosefinch is confined to the Tibetan Plateau. The authors were part of only the second group in over 50 years to see the species, and their observations add much to the current knowledge of this poorly known bird. Also included are the first photographs of the species ever published.

The exploits of the great pioneering Russian ornithologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Tibetan region have been commemorated in the naming of species such as Przevalski's Redstart* *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*, Kozlov's Babax* *Babax koslowi*, Przevalski's Rosefinch* *Urocynchramus pylzowi*, Kozlov's Bunting* *Emberiza koslowi* and Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia* (= *Carpodacus*) *roborowskii*. With the relaxation of travelling restrictions in the 1980s, all except the last species were soon recorded again by visiting bird-watchers, but Roborovski's Rosefinch remained elusive.

This rosefinch, of much debated taxonomic position^{1,7}, was named by Przevalski in 1887, to honour his travelling companions Kozlov and Roborovski. It was first found in May 1884 in the Burchan Buddha range during the fourth and last expedition led by Przevalski. It continued to be recorded irregularly over the next 50 years, but then there were no more reports until news broke that Chikara Otani had encountered a flock of about 15 Roborovski's Rosefinches at the Tanggula Pass on the border of Tibet and Qinghai, well outside the known range, on 10 July 1993⁷.

As part of an RSPB sabbatical project, we were planning to visit the Burchan Buddha range and it was with high expectations that we arrived in the area on 8 September 1995. The weather was good and access to above 5,000 m was possible. Unfortunately, our group became divided and although six Roborovski's Rosefinches were seen on this visit by some of the group, we were unlucky. However, on the return journey through the range, on 16 September 1995, another eight Roborovski's Rosefinches were seen by all.

All our sightings were of birds feeding on the seeds of grasses and crucifers growing on bare earth areas on rocky slopes, just below the scree slopes, at 4,500 - 5,000 m. We had initially searched the high, barren slate plateau, but without success. This accords well with the feeding areas and altitude as described in the literature⁶. The nest of Roborovski's Rosefinch has never been found, although it has

been suggested that it might be located between slate debris, which would provide some shelter⁶.

Detailed descriptions were taken of two rosefinches seen on 16 September. Both birds, based on published descriptions, were presumed to be males and were basically very similar except for a slight variation in the brightness of the plumage. The following description is of the brighter individual, with any differences shown by the second bird noted where appropriate.

The general impression was of a large 'rosefinch', with a proportionately longer and more pointed bill and longer wings than other rosefinches. The wings reached to approximately three-quarters the length of the tail, with 6-7 primary tips extending beyond the tertials. The bird moved about with a hopping gait, often assuming upright alert postures. The dark legs appeared comparatively short for the size of the bird. The bill was pale yellow, but a duller, pinky yellow on the other individual. The forehead, forecrown and sides of head appeared almost blackish, but showed a deep crimson hue at close range and in some lights. The hind crown and nape were grey, slightly darker than the mantle, with some paler flecking noted on the nape, not visible on the second bird. Under the dark eye, there was a small whitish (or perhaps pale pinkish) area, forming a reasonably well-defined crescent. A thin central crown stripe of the same colour was also present, but only a slight trace of this was visible on the second individual. The throat was lilac pink with whitish or pale pink flecking. The remainder of the underparts were lilac pink from breast to undertail-coverts, except for the obvious white 'leggings'. The mantle and scapulars were a pinkish-grey, but with some darker feather tips, giving a variegated impression. The median and greater coverts were brown-centred with pale pinkish-white fringing. The tertials also had blackish-brown centres, but with broad greyish-white fringing, broader on the outer web, with that on the longest tertial forming an obvious whitish area above the primaries. The primaries were blackish-brown with distinct white tips and thin pale-pinkish fringes. The white

Production of this colour plate has been sponsored by Leica Cameras

Leica



1

- Little-known Oriental Bird –**
Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*
 1: Male showing pale bill by Paul N. Collin
 2: Male showing dark bill (Photo: Dennis Weir)
 3: Male showing dark bill (Photo: Neil Lambert)
 4: Male showing pale bill (Photo: Dennis Weir)
 5: Male showing pale bill (Photo: Dennis Weir)



Figure 1: The distribution of Roborovski's Rosefinch.



2



4



3



5

primary tips and greyish-white tertial fringing combined to form a striking pattern from behind. The tail was brownish, with paler outer tail feathers forming very thin, pale edges to the tail.

These two individuals are illustrated in Plates 1, 4 and 5. Although detailed descriptions of the other birds were not obtained, the photographs in Plates 2 and 3 show birds in similar plumages, but with a blackish bill.

The two birds we watched were initially associating with a flock of Horned Larks *Eremophila alpestris*, but then became separated from them. They have not been seen associating with other species, according to previous reports. The only other species we recorded feeding in similar habitats were White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* and Brandt's Mountain Finch* *Leucosticte brandti*.

Although these descriptions and photographs generally accord with previously published accounts, there are a few points worthy of comment:

Wing length. Our observations confirm the impression of Otani that although long, the wings were approximately 3/4 of the tail length, not reaching the end of the tail as described by Meyer de Schauensee⁵ and slightly shorter than described by Clements³.

Bill colour. In the published literature, the bill colour is variously described as follows; male, slate grey and female yellow⁵; male, very dark and female yellow⁷; male, bright or pale yellow with a dark horn tip and female bright or pale yellow³. Our observations suggest that the bill colour of males may change seasonally or may be more variable than previously supposed. This could explain the discrepancies cited above.

General plumage. The presence of a whitish crescent below the eye and thin central crown stripe are features not previously reported.

The range of Roborovski's Rosefinch is imprecisely known, but includes north-east Tibet, the southern and eastern slopes of the Burchan Buddha range, the southern chain of the Amnen-Kor, and the southern Marco Polo chain (Wild Yak steppe) in central Qinghai. Otani's sighting extended the known range to include the Tanggula Pass, on the border of Tibet and Qinghai, 350 km to the south-west, and as the intervening region has never been ornithologically explored, the assumption is made that Roborovski's Rosefinch is likely to occur at appropriate altitude and in suitable habitat throughout this region⁷ (see Figure 1).

Within its range and habitat, Roborovski's Rosefinch may well prove to be quite numerous. Subsequent to our records, four were seen at the same site on 3 October 1995, and three more at another pass of similar altitude in the same

mountain range on 11 October 1995 (G. Speight, pers. comm.). There appear to be no threats to the habitat of Roborovski's Rosefinch, but severe weather, such as was experienced in the region in spring 1996, could have an adverse effect on the population.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our companions on the trip, without whom we would not have seen so many species or had such a good time. Special thanks to Paul Collin, for his painting and useful comments on the draft, and Dennis Weir and Neil Lambert for use of their photographs. We are also grateful to Graham Speight for providing us with details of his observations, Ian Dawson for reference material, Richard Porter, Bob Brown and Richard Grimmett for encouragement and the RSPB for endorsing this trip as a sabbatical project and contributing towards its costs. Finally, we would like to thank Jesper Hornskov for doing all the initial research, making the trip arrangements and, with his family, making our stay in China so enjoyable. Jesper is planning to organise further visits to the area over the next few years and can be contacted at Building 7, Apartment 1-502, Yin Jia Zhuang Xiao Qu, Xining 810001, Qinghai Province, China.

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R. I. Thorpe and D. S. Allen, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, UK.

* Roborovski's Rosefinch and other English names are used at the authors' request. For discussion of the taxonomy of *Kozłowia* (= *Carpodacus*) *roborowskii* see editors' comments in *Bull. OBC* 21: 46-47.

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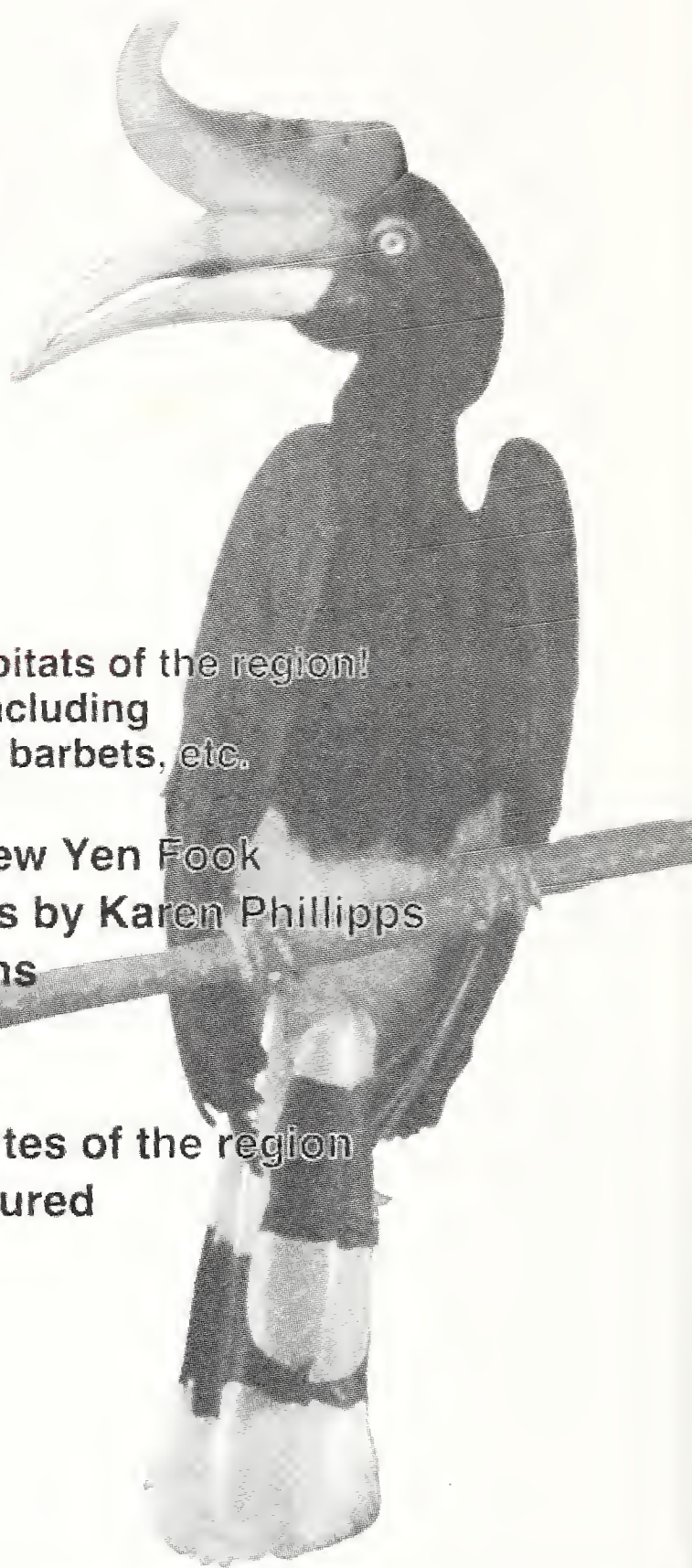
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From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from January 1995 to February 1996. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

BURMA (MYANMAR)

An **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* at Pagan, Central Burma, in late April (JWo) was the first for the country and South-East Asia as a whole. Also of great interest were two pairs of **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* near Inle Lake, southern Shan States, East Burma, on 21-22 January 1996 (FL). The record confirms reports by local people that seven birds were present in the area in 1993 and four to six birds in 1994. Unfortunately, little suitable habitat remains in the area for this regionally threatened species.

CHINA

An adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* at Beidaihe, Hebei, on 30 August (JH) was a country first. Other interesting autumn records at this locality included a late **Greater Painted-snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* on 2 November (JH) and the first recent autumn record of **Streaked Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus sorghophilus*, with a single on 31 August (JH). A series of recent records from Qinghai were received (JH), including the following new records for the province: A **Grey-faced Buzzard** *Butastur indicus* at Dongxia on 18 September, a male **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* at Mengda on 27 September, a **Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus* at Qinghai Hu on 1 October and a **Red-fronted Rosefinch** *Carpodacus puniceus* at Mengda on 29 September. Also of note were an adult **Barbary Falcon** *F. pelegrioides* at Xining Bei Shan on 30 July, a juvenile at Qinghai Hu on 2 October and another adult at Wenquan on 3 October. Also at Qinghai Hu were c. 2,100 **Demoiselle Cranes** *Grus virgo* on 30 September, with 730 on 2 October. A juvenile **Boreal Owl** *Aegolius funereus* was found at Mengda on 4 September, while a juvenile **Slaty-backed Flycatcher** *Ficedula hodgsonii* at Dongxia on 15

August was well north-west of its documented breeding range. A **Chinese Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus sichuanensis* at Laoye Shan on 20 and 23 October was remarkably late. The recently rediscovered **Tibetan Rosefinch** *Kozlowia roborowskii* was seen regularly at Wenquan with six on 8 September, eight on 16 September, four on 3 October and three on 11 October.

HONG KONG

Three potential firsts for the country were seen at Mai Po: an **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* with **Pacific Golden Plovers** *P. fulva* on 8 October (RL), a **Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyrtus minimus* on 7 October (CV) and a **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii* on 11 September (PL). Other vagrants included two **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Mai Po on 22 November (GC); a **Mountain Hawk-Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis* at Long Valley on 5 October (RL), the third record; a **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* off Tsim Bei Tsui pier on 28 October (PA), the fourth record; single **Middendorff's Warblers** *Locustella ochotensis* at Mai Po on 24 September (PL; trapped), Long Valley on 30 September (PL; trapped) and Mai Po on 7 October (RL), the third to fifth records; two **Chinese Blue-Flycatchers** *Cyornis (rubeculoides) glaucicomans* at Aberdeen Country Park on 18 November (JB) and another at Ho Pui Reservoir on 20 November (DS), the third and fourth records, and single **Pallas's Buntings** *Emberiza pallasii* near Mai Po on 8 November (ML,PL; trapped) and Lim Barn Tsuen on 20 November (PL), the second and third records. A total of 99 **Black-faced Spoonbills** *Platalea minor* at Mai Po at the end of November (RL) was a new high count, representing roughly a quarter of the world population. Small numbers of **Aleutian Terns** *Sterna aleutica* were recorded from various sites on various dates between 10 August and 14 October, with a high count of 175

off Cape d'Aguilar on 1 September. A **Bridled Tern** *S. anaethetus* at Long Valley on 3 October and single **Sooty Terns** *S. fuscata* at Cheung (MW) and Tin Shui Wai reclamation (DD) on 3 October were the first inland records.

INDIA

Good news was received from Bharatpur (per BG), where three adult and one juvenile **Siberian Cranes** *Grus leucogeranus* arrived on 1 February 1996, after an absence of two years (Plate 4, page 54). At Harike Bird Sanctuary, Punjab (PU), a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* on 18 May, eight **Eurasian Linnets** *Carduelis cannabina* on 16 December and one or two **Corn Buntings** *Miliaria calandra* on 16 December were all new records for India. Other noteworthy records included an impressive maximum of 1,500 **Pale-backed Pigeons** *Columba eversmanni* between 2 November 1995 and 9 February 1996, at least 650 **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta* on 14 April, a single **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* on 7 May and two on 14 and 18 May, a maximum of 70 **Indian Skimmers** *Rynchops albicollis* (including 36 juveniles) on 9 July, a single **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* on 25 March, a **Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* on 10 December, a **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* on 7 May, a **Scaly Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* on 1 December 1995 to 4 February 1996, a **Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin** *Cercotrichas galactotes* on 12 August, a **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* on 2 November and two on 19 November. Elsewhere in Punjab (PU) there was a **Smoky Warbler** *P. fuliginenter* and another **Scaly Thrush** at Ropar (Rupnagar) on 30 and 31 December respectively, while at Giddar, 10 km east of Harike, there were two **Rufous-vented Prinias** *Prinia burnesii*, including one singing, on 11 February 1996. Further east, near Naini Tal, Uttar Pradesh, a large flock of up to 1,000 **Nepal House-Martins**

Delichon nipalensis was seen on 26 December (AL). At the other end of the country, noteworthy observations at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu (PH), included up to 13 **Bar-headed Geese** *Anser indicus* on 10-12 December, a **Rufous-necked Stint** *C. ruficollis* and a **Spoonbill Sandpiper** *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* on 20 February 1995 and 11 December respectively, an adult male **Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* on 18 February 1995 and a large flock of c. 100 **Slender-billed Gulls** on 9 December. Further west in Tamil Nadu, there were two or three **Purple-backed Starlings** *Sturnus sturninus* in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, near Masinagudi on 5 March (PH). An **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis* was found sitting on wires in Munnar town, Kerala on 14 December (PH). In the Andaman Islands, eight **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* on Havelock Island, South Andaman, on 29 November (PH) and a **Siberian Blue Robin** *Luscinia cyane* in Mount Harriet National Park, South Andaman, on 27 November (PH) were both unusual records.

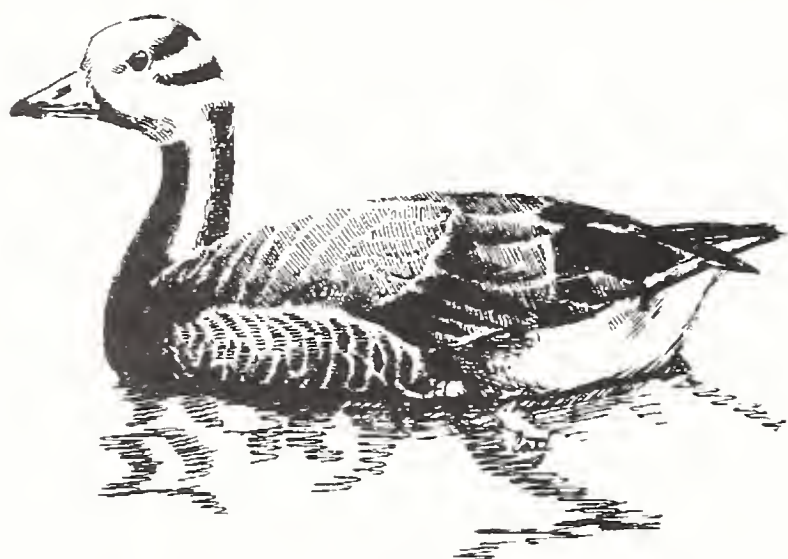
INDONESIA

Buru

A joint PHPA/BirdLife survey on the island during October-December produced the following new records (MP): three **Little Terns** *Sterna albifrons*, close offshore near Waipandan, a **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* near Waikeka on 24 November and two near Waipandan on 12 October, a **Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* at Waikeka on 11 December, two different **Cinnamon Bitterns** *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* in Mako and at least 11 **Little Pied Flycatchers** *Ficedula westermanni*, a new resident species, inland of Fogi (1,340 m elevation). In addition, three probable **Pomarine Jaegers** *Stercorarius pomarinus* were seen flying along the coast at Wamlana on 12 December. The endemic **Streaky-breasted Jungle-Flycatcher** *Rhinomyias addita* was found to be rather common inland of Fogi (500-1,100 m elevation), with a total of nearly 40 recorded, and another five were found inland of Waikeka. The species was last recorded in 1921. Two **Rufous-throated White-eyes** *Madanga ruficollis*, another endemic, were seen in a mixed species feeding flock at Danau Rana (1,460 m elevation), the first recorded since the discovery of the species in 1922.

Sulawesi

A **Geomalia** *Geomalia heinrichi* was seen well and photographed at Anaso Logging Camp, Lore



Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* by Carl D'Silva

Lindu, on 19 September (Plate 1, page 54) (JW). A record of a **Banded Bay Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sonneratii* at Wuasa village on 22 September (JW), submitted without any notes, would be the first for Sulawesi.

Sumatra

In October, a single male **Black-crowned Pitta** *Pitta venusta* was located at Bukit Kaba (near Bengkulu) and there were at least two singing males at Barisan Selatan Reserve (near Kubuprahu), Liwa (FV). This little known species has, perhaps, only been recorded by one other observer since 1927. A pair of **Long-billed Wren-Babblers** *Rimator malacoptilus* on Gunung Dempo, Selatan, in October (FV) were well to the south of their previously documented range in Sumatra. On Bintan Island, the following species were new records for the Riau Archipelago: A **Violet Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus* heard at Pasir Panjang West on 10 June (SRa), three **Pomarine Jaegers** *Stercorarius pomarinus* off Batam Island on 4 March (NBC,SSu/SSup,SRa), two **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes* over Pasir Panjang West on 5 March (NBC,SSu/SSup,SRa), a **Grey-faced Buzzard** *Butastur indicus* near Tanjong Said on 7 November (KKS,NBC,SSu/SSup,SRa), a **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* migrating over Tanjong Said on 8 November (SRa), 12 **Great Egrets** *Casmerodius albus* near Tanjong Said on 8 November (SSu/SSup,SRa), a **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* near Tanjong Said on 8 November (KKS,NBC,SSu/SSup,SRa), an **Eyebrowed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus* and a male **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia* near Tanjong Tondang on 26 March (NBC,SRa), at least two **Ashy Bulbuls** *Hemixos flava* near Tanjong Said on 9 November (KKS,SRa) and several **Yellow Wagtails** *Motacilla flava* near Tanjong Said on 8-9 November (KKS,NBC). The following species were added to the Bintan Island list: A male **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea* at Tanjong Tondang on 27 March (NBC,SRa), single **Emerald Doves** *Chalcophaps indica* at Tanjong Sambang in June (NUS) and Tanjong Said on 8 November, a **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* at Tanjong Tondang on 25 March (NBC,SRa) and an **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* at Tanjong Sambang in June (NUS).

Tanimbar Islands

A visit to southern Yamdena, during 27 January to 3 February 1996 (DB,HB,ME,PS *et al.*), resulted in

observations of the following new species for the Tanimbar islands: two **Green Pygmy-geese** *Nettapus pulchellus*, the first Wallacean record since 1922; two or three grey morph **Oriental Cuckoos** *Cuculus saturatus*; **Brush Cuckoo** *Cacomantis variolosus* and **Lesser Coucal** *Centropus bengalensis*, which were both common; **Uniform Swiftlet** *Collocalia vanikorensis*, which was common over forest; a single **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*; three **Plain Bush-hens** *Amaurornis olivaceus*; a single juvenile **Oriental Honey-buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*; a pair and a single **Bonelli's Eagles** *Hieraaetus fasciatus*; two or three **Australian Hobbies** *Falco longipennis* hunting near Saumlaki; an adult **Peregrine Falcon** *F. peregrinus* of the migrant subspecies *calidus*; a single breeding plumaged **Australasian Grebe** *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*, the first Wallacean record for many years; three or four **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis* and **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* were common. The following species were recorded for only the second time: four to six **Great Egrets** *Casmerodius albus*; up to ten **Great Crested-Terns** *Sterna bergii* fishing in Saumlaki Bay; three or four **Brown Quails** *Coturnix ypsilophora*; **Tawny Grassbird** *Megalurus timoriensis*, which was common, and several small groups of **Five-coloured Munias** *Lonchura quincolor*. In addition, a rail seen briefly with young, was thought to be **Barred Rail** *Gallirallus torquatus*. Outstanding amongst the resident avifauna was the re-discovery of **Lesser Masked-Owl** *T. sororcula*, with a single seen well on 29 January along a new logging track through tall primary forest. The species was last recorded in 1923 and has not previously been found on Yamdena.

Timor

At least two **Australian Darters** *Anhinga novaehollandiae*, a single **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* and at least 20 **Royal Spoonbills** *Platalea regia* were found in wetlands near Bipolo, in late September/early October (FV).

MALAYSIA

Three **Vinous-breasted Starlings** *Sturnus burmanicus* were seen with a mixed group of mynas at Hulu Langat, Selangor, on 12 September (MC, OCH,YKT) and would be the first records south of northern peninsular Thailand if accepted. An **Oriental Hobby** *Falco severus* was identified at Fraser's Hill in late August and seen again on 5 September (OCH *et al.*); the species is still a vagrant in West Malaysia. Three **Red Collared-Doves**

Bat Hawk
Macheiramphus
alcinus by Sutari bin
Supari



Streptopelia tranquebarica were seen along the Johor River near Johor Lama on 29 April (SRa), extending the known range of the Singapore feral population north into West Malaysia. Two **Brown-backed Flowerpeckers** *Dicaeum everetti* were seen in a fruiting fig at Panti Forest Reserve, Johor, on 5 April (TL,PL,LKC,SRa) and there has been another recent record of this rare and local species from the same locality. Two **Bat Hawks** *Macheiramphus alcinus* were found nest building in a tree at Temenggor Forest Reserve, Perak, on 4-7 December (MC, SSup), perhaps only the third breeding record. An unusually large congregation of over 1,000 **Forest Wagtails** *Dendronanthus indicus* was observed coming to roost in scrubland between Delima Resort and Pulau Langkawi Airport on 2 and 4 January 1995, (SRa).

NEPAL

A **Lesser Spotted Eagle's** *Aquila pomarina* nest was found in a mango tree at Lumbini, western Nepal, in April/May (DWh,KW); the species is a very local breeder in Nepal. Also of interest was a westerly extension to the range of **Ashy Wood-Pigeon** *Columba pulchricollis*, with a single seen well near Jumla on 6 May (DWh,KW). A **White-throated Fantail** *Rhipidura albicollis* found at 3,100 m elevation in Lake Rara National Park in each May (DWh,KW) was the highest Nepalese record to date. Other noteworthy records in the park during early May (DWh,KW) included a pair of

Upland Buzzards *Buteo hemilasius* (possibly breeding), a **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus*, a pair of **Little Pied Flycatchers** *Ficedula westermanni* and **Tibetan Serin** *Serinus thibetanus*.

SINGAPORE

A male **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata*, found on Upper Seletar Reservoir on 12 February 1995 (NBC,KKS,LKL,SRa), was the first for Singapore. Also new or confirmed for the first time were single **Oriental Cuckoos** *Cuculus saturatus* at Tuas on 21 October and 2 December (PK; both trapped) and Sime Road on 2 November (AC,LKS,AY,YPL) and a first winter male **Besra** *Accipiter virgatus*, trapped at Tuas on 26 November (PK). An adult **Rosy Starling** *Sturnus roseus* at Tuas from 5-30 November (PRK *et al.*) and a male **Japanese Paradise-Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* at Sime Forest on 1 November (SM,KM,NBC,SRa) were both second records for Singapore. A single **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* was seen at Sungei Buloh Nature Park on 14 October (JHa,SRa) and 19 and 22 October (PK,KKS,SSu,SRa). A female **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* seen at Tuas on 9 February 1996 (TO,SRa) was probably the same bird first recorded on 6 November (PK,RO). This bird and a second recorded during the period are the first for many years. Also of interest was a breeding record of **Lesser Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna javanica*, an adult and six juveniles having been seen at Singapore Botanic Gardens on 6 January 1995 (RT,SRa). A pair of **Oriental Pied-Hornbills** *Anthraceroceros albirostris* was still present at Kampong Melayu, Pulau Ubin, on 16 December (LKS,SA). A male **Cinnamon-headed Green-Pigeon** *Treron fulvicollis* seen at Pulau Ubin on 23 March (PK,RO,THC,SRa) adds to the growing number of records from this site and it is hoped that it may return as a breeding species to Singapore. Also at Pulau Ubin was a **Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* on 8 April (SRa). Further to the record of **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* at Serangoon on 2 May 1994 recorded in Bulletin 20, two were at the same locality on 7 May (WEH,DT), and by 23 October nine birds were present including a pair with four chicks (SP,RT,KKS,SR).

SRI LANKA

Two **White-headed Stilts** *Himantopus leucocephalus* amongst **Black-winged Stilts** *H. himantopus* at Bundala Lewaya on 18 November (RDS), a **Lesser**

Kestrel *Falco naumanni* at Palatupana on 7 February 1995 (DW) and a summer plumage **Chinese Pond-Heron** *Ardeola bacchus* at Debera Wewa, Tissamaharama on 30 April (DZ,HZ) were all new records for the country. Also of interest was a **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba leucopsis* at Kalametiya Sanctuary on 22 March (SR,DW), the first record of this subspecies for the country. A total of at least 1,256 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* at Bundala Lewaya on 19 October (SJ,RDS) was an encouragingly high count.

THAILAND

A **Japanese Robin** *Erithacus akahige* at the AIT campus, Pathumthani, near Bangkok, on 2 December (FL) was the second Thai record and only the third for South-East Asia. A flock of the highly localised **White-bellied Green-Pigeon** *Treron sieboldii* was seen in Kaeng Krachan National Park (km 15), Phetchaburi, on 4 November (AN,WY). A **Mangrove Pitta** *Pitta megarhyncha* was observed in mangrove scrub at Rangjan, Samut Sakhon, on 18 November (JWo), the first record away from the west coast of the peninsula. Other reported rarities, which need to be clarified, included 20-25 **Dark-rumped Swifts** *Apus acuticauda*, heading north-west over km 34-36, Doi Inthanon, on 1 February 1995 and a single **Wood Snipe** *Gallinago nemoricola* in swampy forest along trail 6, Khao Yai National Park, on 5 February 1995 (both PS-H). A male **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata* was apparently still present in mangroves at Krabi on 15 August (Anon. record in bird log at Chan Phen Tour). Large waterbirds made a showing with 11 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* over Wat Phai Lom, near Bangkok, on 25 November (WS), 13 **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* at Ban Laem, Phetchaburi on 8 October and another 3 in Kaeng Krachan National Park (1,000 m elevation) on 15 January (CR *et al.*-Birdquest). Also at Kaeng Krachan was another recent record of **Silver Oriole** *Oriolus mellianus*, with a male on 23 December (SSut). It seems that this local species may regularly occur this far west. An impressive total of 1,750 **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes* was counted passing west over Rangjan village, Samut Sakhon, in just one hour on 22 October (PR,SS). Due to an abundance of flowering bamboo, **Pin-tailed Parrotfinches** *Erythrura prasina* were present in considerable numbers at Khao Phra Bang Khram Wildlife Sanctuary, Krabi, during October 1995 to

January 1996 (many observers) and three were observed in Kaeng Krachan National Park on 18 January 1996 (CR *et al.*-Birdquest).

VIETNAM

A visit to a bird market in Phung Hiep, Hau Giang Province, Cochinchina, on 13 January 1996 (EM) resulted in the discovery of a surprising new species for Vietnam and South-East Asia: a **Corn Crane** *Crex crex*. The bird had been trapped for food at nearby Soc Trang, along with at least 50 **Slaty-breasted Rails** *Gallirallus striatus*, 100 **Baillon's Crakes** *Porzana pusilla*, 100 **Ruddy-breasted Crakes** *P. fusca* and 150 **Watercocks** *Gallicrex cinerea*. Exciting observations were made at the Red River Delta, East Tonkin, on 7-8 January 1996 (JE,FL). At least 15 **Spoonbill Sandpipers** *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* were counted, the largest number recorded in the country and evidence that the species winters at this site. A single **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* was the first record for Vietnam and totals of 71 **Black-faced Spoonbills** *P. minor* and 14 **Nordmann's Greenshanks** *Tringa guttifer* were the largest national counts to date.

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1: *Geomalia Geomalia heinrichi* Lore Lindu, Sulawesi, Indonesia, 19 September 1995 (Photo: Jan Wendeby)
2: Adult summer Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* showing apparently pale bill, Mai Po, Hong Kong, 4 March 1995 (Photo: Geoff J. Carey)
3: Unidentified shortwing *Brachypteryx* sp., Sitio Siete, Mindanao, Philippines, 27 February 1996 (Photo: Pete Morris)
4: Two adult and one immature Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus*, Bharatpur, India, 12 February 1996 (Photo: A. J. and E. Murphy, Focalpoint)



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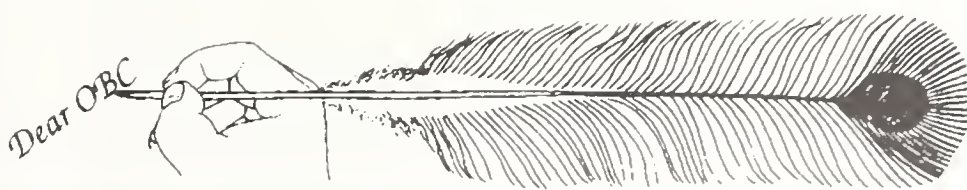
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To the Editor



Sightings of an unusual, possibly new shortwing in the Philippines

In January 1994, during a visit to an area of forest above Sitio Siete near to Lake Sebu in South Cotabato, southern Mindanao, Nina Higgins and I observed and heard a species which appeared to be an unfamiliar species of shortwing *Brachypteryx*. The bird in question appeared to be common in the lower patches of forest (c. 800 - 1,000 m) and was most conspicuous by its loud and distinctive song. However, as is typical of this genus, the birds were skulking and difficult to observe in the field and were only seen briefly in response to tape playback when the only features noted were a small, shortwing-shaped bird with all slate-blue plumage but for a short white supercilium which was at times concealed.

The only species of shortwing known from the Philippines is White-browed Shortwing *B. montana* which, although similar in appearance to the mystery bird, has a totally different and very distinctive song. White-browed Shortwing was found to be common above c. 1,100 m at Sitio Siete. Consequently, on leaving the site I was somewhat confused as to the bird's identity. In February 1995 I returned to the same location along with Ken Mitchell. Between my visits, other birders visiting the site had reported the same mystery bird (identifiable as the same by recordings of the song) as a 'strange sub-species (?) of Little Slaty Flycatcher'. I therefore made a special effort to observe the species again and, on shape and behavioural characteristics, I became convinced that the bird was indeed a shortwing and wondered whether it may be a new taxon. What is more, I discovered the mystery species and White-browed Shortwing singing within 100 m of each other, and reconfirmed the fact that the mystery species occupied the altitudinal range of c. 750 m (the lowest extant forest at the site) to 1,050 m, from where White-browed Shortwing took over.

In February 1996, I returned to the site, along with Jon Hornbuckle, with the intention of finding out more about the mystery species and hopefully trapping individuals. Although they

proved difficult to catch, we managed to catch a male (Plate 3). The birds would not be tape-lured into a mist-net and appeared to see the net. The only bird caught went into the net at dusk during a thunderstorm when the visibility was extremely poor and it is therefore not possible to prove that the caught bird was the species commonly heard singing in the area. However, the individual was trapped at c. 850 m, well below the usual altitude of White-browed Shortwing at this site. Indeed, I have never heard White-browed Shortwing within 1 km of the area where the individual was trapped and it therefore seemed extremely likely that the bird trapped was one of the mystery birds. In the hand, a detailed description was taken, along with a blood sample for DNA analysis and a series of biometric measurements. Superficially, the bird (plate 3, p.54) appeared very similar to White-browed Shortwing, though some minor differences in both biometrics and plumage were noted.

I am currently carrying out museum work and awaiting DNA results to determine the exact identity of the mystery bird for future publication. The reason for this letter is to draw the attention of future visiting birders to southern Mindanao of the existence of this skulking mystery bird and to alert them to listen out for the loud and distinctive song, which begins and ends abruptly and often includes mimicry.

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Bill colour of Saunders's Gull

Since the time of the original description of the species, and until recently, the bill colour of Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* has almost invariably been described as black or blackish and no distinction has been made between the bill colour of adults and immatures^{1,3,4,6,7,8,10}. Saunders himself described the bill colour of adults in breeding plumage as "black, with a ruddy tinge on the lower mandible" and of the juvenile

("young") as "dull brown"⁵. He was followed in this respect by Dwight².

An excellent site for studying the field characters of Saunders's Gull is the Deep Bay boardwalk hide at Mai Po Nature Reserve, Hong Kong. Between November and March this species can often be observed here during high tides at ranges from 20-50 m, and in numbers of up to 150. Usually the closest gulls present are Saunders's Gulls. Our observations from this hide have revealed that the bill colour of Saunders's Gull, *as perceived by the observer*, seems to be dependent on the viewing angle and the lighting conditions.

On 4 March 1995, of 121 individuals present (86 adults and 35 first-years), roughly 20 came close enough to the hide to permit careful checking of their bill colour. The weather was sunny with hardly any wind. When adults were facing the observer, the bill invariably seemed to be paler than the black hood (on those birds which had completed or nearly completed the pre-breeding head moult), and in some cases considerably paler. The upper mandible consistently looked paler than the lower mandible. When viewed side-on, however, this effect was much less pronounced and in most birds the bill was nearly as dark as the hood, with no difference between the upper and lower mandibles apparent. A few individuals did still show paler areas on the bill when viewed side-on, especially along the basal half of the upper mandible and at the base of the lower mandible.

From these observations, the bill colour of a bird viewed side-on usually appears black with a reddish or horn-coloured hue; when the bird is facing the observer, the bill may look pale red, dirty orange, dark (not bright) yellow, pale brown or dull greyish, particularly on the upper mandible. The apparent pale colour on the bill of a facing bird can be seen in Plate 2, page 54. In first-years the bill colour seemed to be more consistently blackish, although in one individual it looked pale horn, most noticeably on the upper mandible. Of four adult Saunders's Gulls studied by Teruaki Morioka, Michiaki Ujihara and TH on a tidal mudflat at Yatsu, Chiba-ken, Japan, on 15 February 1995, one perching at close range also appeared to show a reddish hue to the bill. Likewise of 135 Saunders's Gulls (of which the vast majority were adults) observed by Nial Moores and TH at Isahaya Bay, Nagasaki-ken, Japan, on 21 February 1995, several of the closest birds also showed this hue. The bill colour of distant or flying Saunders's Gulls invariably looks black.

Often the seemingly pale bill colours of some gulls have been explained by observers as being the effect of dried-on mud. We carefully checked for this but could not detect any traces of mud on the bills, which all looked perfectly clean.

We are confident that the true bill colour of adult Saunders's Gulls ranges from dark reddish-black to black and we suspect that the perceived paler bill colours of birds facing the observer is caused by a combination of effects⁹, resulting from several or all of the following factors: the variable extent of red, orange, yellow or brown pigments on the bill surface, the structure and reflective nature of the bill surface, or direct sunlight on the bill.

Although the alleged black bill is not a diagnostic field character of Saunders's Gull, it is an important one. Observers who are not aware of the apparent variability of this character may become confused and we hope that this will help to clarify the matter.

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The status and identification of *Gorsachius* herons in southern Taiwan

From 1989 to 1994 I lived in Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan and during this time observed several *Gorsachius* herons in the surrounding countryside. In doing so I became aware of the rather scanty, and in some respects confusing, literature on the status and identification of Malayan Night-Heron *G. melanolophus* and Japanese Night-Heron *G. goisagi* in this part of Asia. The literature relating to Taiwan variously reports Malayan Night-Heron as a breeding resident¹ and winter straggler⁸. Japanese Night-Heron is described as a rare winter visitor, or a passage migrant to/from Philippine wintering grounds^{1,4,5,8}, with one breeding record near Shanping Forest Reserve (altitude 700 m), about 50 km north-east of Kaohsiung⁹.

All my observations of *Gorsachius* herons were made within 50 km of Kaohsiung, the majority within 30 km in an area of low hills bordering the Kaoping River to the north, north-east of the city near the villages of Tashu, Hsipu, Linkou, Hoshangliao and Yenchao. Birds were seen at altitudes up to about 300-400 m in one of three habitat types: densely planted overgrown orchards; steep-sided gullies choked with secondary growth, bamboo and a few native trees; or little visited valleys with dense waterside vegetation. They were not seen in other parts of southern Taiwan, which were however visited far less frequently. Local birdwatchers seldom visit these areas and perhaps as a consequence appeared to be largely unfamiliar with either species. In the course of about 200 visits to these habitats I recorded *Gorsachius* herons on 21 occasions. The literature reports *Gorsachius* herons to be found in (lowland) forests usually associated with swamps or streams^{4,5,6,8}. However, whilst the above habitats contained water during the wet season, in the prolonged dry season only a few pools remained in sheltered spots and my observations of *Gorsachius* herons were not restricted to those pools.

My observations generally agreed with the identification features already described in the published literature. I found that the best features to distinguish between the two species were the white tips to the primaries, not always visible at rest and best seen in flight, and the black crown and nape, attributable to the crest. Both are stated to be diagnostic of Malayan Night-Heron and lacking in Japanese Night-Heron. In poor light the black crest was often hard to see when the bird flattened its feathers and the colour of the facial

skin could also not be distinguished. In good light the generally richer chestnut-brown coloration of the head, neck and upper body of Malayan Night-Heron was a useful feature, compared to the darker drabber brown Japanese Night-Heron. The more subtle variations in the markings of the breast² were usually difficult to see.

Facial skin colour I found to be a potentially confusing feature after I saw one bird very well in open ground in July 1994. I took the following description. "When first seen the bird was standing, neck extended forward, bill pointing forwards. It moved its head, looked around, then walked a few steps forward. Crest, erected briefly, black with a white stripe on some feathers. Head, neck and upper body, plain chestnut brown. Folded wings, darker and drabber brown, black primaries with no white tips visible at rest. Upper mandible, almost black, lower mandible, pale horn. Facial skin, greenish-yellow. Iris, yellow. Legs and feet, dull green-brown. It became nervous, crouched, ran a short distance, stopped again and flew, when white tips to the primaries were clearly visible." Photographs in the literature illustrate the posture adopted¹⁴ and the striped crest feathers⁴.

This bird showed all the features of Malayan Night-Heron except the colour of the facial skin. The only other indication that Malayan Night-Heron may in some plumages have greenish-yellow facial skin are two illustrations^{5,6}. Melville² states that the facial skin of Japanese Night-Heron changes from yellow to blue in the breeding season, and this is corroborated by photographs taken at the nest^{12,14}, which include nestlings showing blue skin. Ali and Ripley³ state that the orbital skin of Malayan Night-Heron may become suffused with a reddish colour in the breeding season. No other birds identified as Malayan Night-Heron showed greenish-yellow facial skin, or evidence of a white stripe to the crown feathers. I would urge caution in using facial skin colour to differentiate between the two species.

On eight occasions between March and November I saw evidence of pairing in birds identified as Malayan Night-Heron and obtained evidence of breeding in July 1993 when I saw two adults with two juveniles. One juvenile was seen well and the following description noted. "Crown, black barred with white. Upperparts, brown mottled with white. Breast, finely barred dark brown/black. Bill, horn coloured. Facial skin, bluish-green. The overall appearance and posture resembled the illustration in Wu and Yang¹³."

Malayan Night-Heron is described in the literature as secretive or shy^{6,7}. I have twice seen birds walking in open ground and been able to

approach quite closely before the bird has taken flight. Japanese Night-Heron, has been reported in non-breeding areas as "tame" and to be seen in open ground^{7,11}. When I encountered a *Gorsachius* heron, the bird invariably flew into the mid-storey of adjacent trees only a few metres away, perching at a height of 3-4 m. Often they could be flushed again, sometimes twice, by continuing to walk in the same direction; usually they double-backed behind the observer after 200-300 m.

I was unable to confirm the calls of Malayan Night-Heron as described in the literature^{6,7,10}. Birds were silent, with the exception of an adult and juvenile which were seen to be uttering single low-pitched 'kwok' calls, similar to those of Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*.

On the basis of the features outlined above I identified Japanese Night-Heron on three occasions, twice in December 1993 (probably same bird) and in March 1994. I identified Malayan Night-Heron on 13 occasions throughout the year. All other sightings were inconclusive. I suggest that in southern Taiwan, Japanese Night-Heron is a rare winter visitor and passage migrant, and Malayan Night-Heron is an uncommon breeding resident. The future of both species is far from secure as their preferred habitat types are under great threat around Kaohsiung from land-use changes.

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Free Press

Compiled by Guy Dutson



This feature aims to publicise papers and reports of interest to members. If anyone has written or knows of recent publications worthy of inclusion in this feature, please send details to the OBC for future bulletins.

REGIONAL

Proposed additions to the genus *Lonchura* (Estrildinae) by R. Restall (c/o Aerocav No 1330, PO Box 025304, Miami, FL 33102-5304, U.S.A.). *Bull. B.O.C.* 115: 140-157. New (or reinstated) subspecies include Scaly-breasted Munia on Borneo (*Lonchura punctulata holmesi*), White-rumped Munia on Sumatra (*L. striata sumatrensis*), Five-coloured Munia on Sumba (*L. quanticolor sumbae*), White-headed Munia in Vietnam (*L. maja vietnamensis*)

and Chestnut Munia in south Borneo (*L. atricapilla obscura* and *L. atricapilla selimbaue*).

CAMBODIA

A record of Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) for Cambodia by Kate O'Sullivan (CWS Cambodia c/o P.O. Box 82, Phnom Penh, Cambodia). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 297-298. First record, caught by a farmer December 1993.

CHINA

Vorkommen und Gesang der Jankowskiammer (*Emberiza jankowskii*) in der Chinesischen Provinz Jiliin by Zhao Zheng Jie et al. (18 Wei Xing Road, Changchun, PR China). *J. Orn.* **135**: 617-620. About 400 pairs of Rufous-backed Buntings breed in Jilin.

HONG KONG

Birding in Hong Kong - a site guide by David Diskin (P.O. Box 952, Shatin Central Post Office, New Territories, Hong Kong). Second edition of this comprehensive, privately published guide.

INDIA

Landscape ecology and conservation of birds in the Western Ghats, South India by R. J. R. Daniels (M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, 3rd Cross Street, Taramani Institutional Area, Madras, India 600113). *Ibis* **138**: 64-69. Various indices of each species' "value" are used to formulate a series of protected areas maximising habitat and species richness.

INDONESIA

Kukila 7(2) (The Editors, Kukila, P.O. Box 4087, Jakarta 12040, Indonesia) includes:
Birds of Bukit Tigapuluh, Southern Riau, Sumatra by F. Danielsen and M. Heegaard.
Discovery of waterbird colonies in North Lampung, Sumatra by D. A. Holmes and Yus Rusila Noor.
The birds of Salayar and the Flores Sea Islands by G. Dutson.
Some bird records from Obi, Maluku by M. D. Lindsay.

The Maleo *Macrocephalon maleo*: new information on the distribution and status of Sulawesi's endemic megapode by M. Argeloo (Zoological Museum, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 94766, 1009 GT Amsterdam, Netherlands). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* **4**: 383-393. Suveys found 83 nesting grounds around Dumoga-Bone National Park.

The conservation status of key bird species on Taliabu and the Sula Islands, Indonesia by P. Davidson et al. (24 Christchurch Road, Norwich NR2 2AE, UK.). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* **5**: 1-20. Expedition results show lowland forest species to be threatened; includes the second record of

Taliabu Masked-Owl *Tyto nigrobrunnea*.

Population sizes, status and habitat associations of the restricted-range bird species of Sumba, Indonesia by M. J. Jones et al. (Conservation Research Group, Dept Biological Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University, Chester Street, Manchester M1 5GD, UK.). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* **5**: 21-52. Population estimates of forest species; with an estimated 6,500 of the rarest endemic, Sumba Hornbill *Aceros everetti*.

The Javan Hawk-Eagle: new information on its distribution in Central Jawa and notes on its threats by R. Sözer and V. Nijman (Institute for Systematics and Population Biology, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 94766, 1090 GT Amsterdam, Netherlands). *Tropical Biodiversity* **3**: 49-55. Birds on Mts Slamet and Merapi bridge the west and east Java populations.

Behavioural ecology, distribution and conservation of the Javan Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi* Stresemann, 1924 by R. Sözer and V. Nijman (as above). Report no. 62 of Institute of Systematics and Population Biology, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 94766, 1090 GT Amsterdam, Netherlands. Full report of above, part-OBC-funded project.

The rediscovery of *Monarcha boanensis* (Aves: Monarchidae) from Boano Island, Indonesia by C. W. Moeliker and C. J. Heij (Natuurmuseum Rotterdam, PO Box 23452, NL-3001 KL Rotterdam, Netherlands). *Deinsea* **2**: 123-143. Rediscovery, taxonomy and colour photographs of Black-chinned Monarch.

The biology of the Moluccan megapode *Eulipoa wallacei* (Aves, Galliformes, Megapodiidae) on Haruku and other Moluccan islands; part 1: scope of the study and preliminary results by C. J. Heij (as above). *Deinsea* **2**: 145-155. Productivity data and colour photographs.

Notes on the Moluccan Megapode *Eulipoa wallacei* (G.R. Gray, 1860) following rediscovery of two major nesting grounds by R. W. R. J. Dekker et al. (National Museum of Natural History, PO Box 9517, 2300 RA Leiden, Netherlands). *Zool. Med. Leiden* **69**: 251-260. Breeding ecology of about half the known world population.

NORTH KOREA

Dreijährige ornithologische Studien in Nordkorea by J. Fiebig (Museum für Naturkunde, Invalidenstr. 43, D-10115 Berlin, Germany). *Mitt. Zool. Mus. Berl. Suppl. Ann. Orn.* **17**: 93-146 and 19:

43-99. Reviews the status of 294 species recorded recently in North Korea.

LAOS

A Black-headed Bunting (*Emberiza melanocephala*) record from South-East Asia by Richard M. Thewlis (52 Long Reach Road, Chesterton, Cambridge CB4 1UJ, UK). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 43: 171-172. A singing male in Vientiane Province, Laos, November 1994, first record for South-East Asia.

MALAYSIA

The birds of Temengor Forest Reserve, Hulu Perak, Malaysia by G. W. H. Davison (Malaysian Nature Society, P.O. Box 10750, 50724 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia). *Malayan Nature Journal* 48: 371-386. Systematic list of 215 species recorded on the MNS Expedition to Belum 1993-1994.

Altitudinal survey of birds in Belum and Temengor, Hulu Perak, Malaysia by Richard Gregory-Smith (Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia). *Malay. Nat. J.* 48: 387-395. 155 species recorded on a survey and ringing study between 1992-1993.

Birds of Sarawak. A pocket checklist by Richard Gregory-Smith (as above). *Universiti Malaysia Sarawak*. Checklist in Sibley and Monroe order with status and distribution codes.

Bird population persistence in Sabahan logging concessions by A. Grieser Johns (Dept Anthropology, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK). *Biol. Conserv.* 75: 3-10. The few species unable to survive in logged forest persisted in small unlogged patches.

PHILIPPINES

The threatened and near-threatened birds of Luzon, Philippines, and the role of the Sierra Madre mountains in their conservation by M. K. Poulsen (c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* 5: 79-115. The largest forest block in Luzon, these mountains support 14 threatened species.

THAILAND

A record of Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*) in Thailand by Jelle Scharringa (Meerkoethof 8, 3582 Utrecht, Holland). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 291. Third record, Doi Inthanon, February 1983.

The first record of Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) for Thailand by Jarujin Nabhitabhata and Philip D. Round (Ecological Research Division, Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technical Research, 196 Phaholyothin Road, Bangkok 10900, Thailand). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 292-293. First record, Kamphaeng Saen, December 1986.

The first sighting of Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) for Thailand by Iain S. Robertson (Laurelbank, Exnaboe, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS, UK.). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 294. First record, Bang Poo, January 1981.

Mangrove Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis rufigastra*), a new resident bird record for Thailand by Craig Robson (63 Stafford Street, Norwich NR2 3BD, UK). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 295. First confirmed record, Krabi, summer 1987.

Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) in Chaiyaphum Province: the first record for Thailand by J. M. Turton (Yorkshire Birding, 150 Everill Gate Lane, Broomhill, Wombwell, Barnsley, S. Yorks S73 0YJ, UK). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 42: 296. First record, January 1984.

VIETNAM

A survey of the Annamese Lowlands, Vietnam, and its implications for the conservation of Vietnamese and Imperial Pheasants *Lophura hatinhensis* and *L. imperialis* by J. C. Eames et al. (BirdLife International Vietnam Programme, 12 Cao Ba Quat, Ba Dinh, Hanoi, Vietnam). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* 4: 343-382. Vietnamese, and probably Imperial Pheasants were found but are threatened by logging and hunting.

Rediscovery of the Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herberti* in central Vietnam by J. C. Eames et al. (as above). *Bird Conserv. Internatn.* 5: 129-135. Known only from an historical site in Laos, birds were seen in lowland evergreen forest on limestone.

Checklist of the birds of Vietnam by Võ Quy and Nguyen Cu (Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam). Checklist in Vietnamese and English of 828 species in Howard and Moore order. Includes status codes, distribution codes and index.



Recently published

Cheng and the Golden Pheasant by Yang Qunrong. *The World Pheasant Association*, 1995. 268 pp. ISBN 0-90684-20-8. £19.95 (hbk).

This is a fascinating and readable biography of Cheng Tso-hsin, China's most distinguished ornithologist, and the turbulent times in which he has lived. Cheng was born in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, on November 18, 1906 to a family of scholars and was brought up by his father and grandmother after his mother died when he was only five. He took a great interest in animals and in learning English from an early age, and later attended Fujian Christian University where he was an outstanding student. An uncle sponsored him to study at the University of Michigan when he was only 19, and by the age of 24 he had won his doctorate in zoology.

He returned home to Fujian Christian University and married a teacher from the primary school attached to the college. After the war against Japan started in 1937, the university was forced to move inland to Shaowu in northern Fujian where Cheng studied the ornithology of this little known region. He was later appointed as a visiting professor in the US but returned to China where he was told the Communists would respect and

support scientists. After the Communist takeover in 1949 he joined the Chinese Academy of Sciences where he has worked ever since.

In the mid-1950s he opposed the sparrow-killing campaign that swept the country, and in the Cultural Revolution this was used against him as evidence that he was a reactionary academic who opposed Chairman Mao. During the Cultural Revolution he was imprisoned in a cowshed and many of his scientific and personal papers were destroyed. But Cheng was not intimidated and by the late 1970s he was publishing paper after paper and was receiving foreign visitors once again.

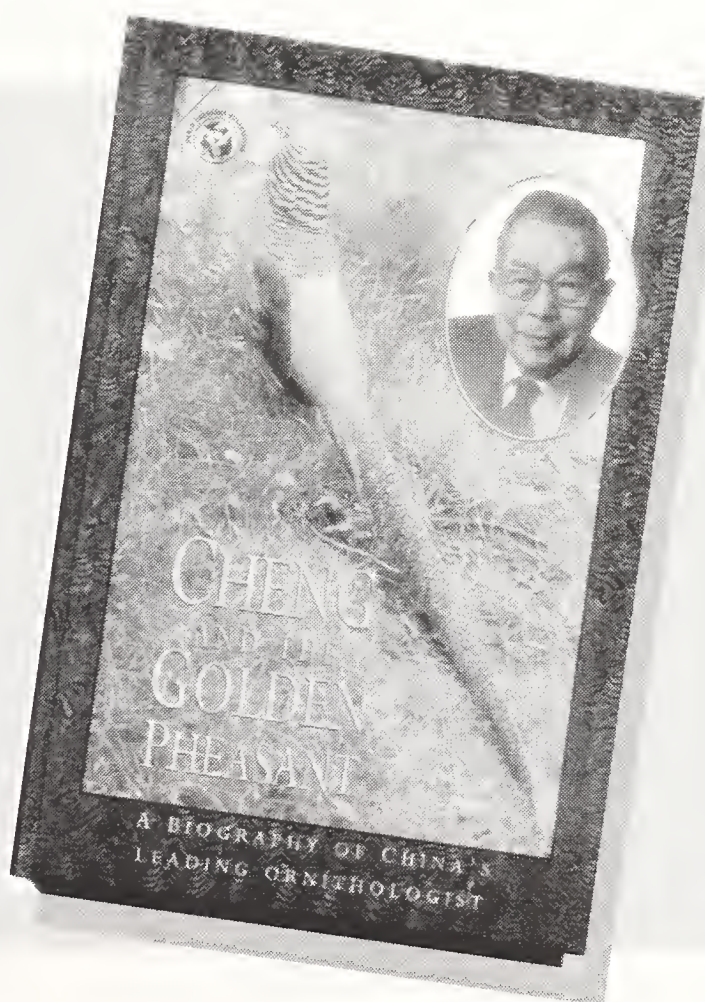
This official biography, translated from the Chinese, depicts a model intellectual and patriot who is the father of modern Chinese ornithology. Many Western ornithologists have met Cheng either in Beijing or abroad and have been delighted by his warmth and enthusiasm, but few know much about his life or background. So why not treat yourself to a copy of this biography - just in time for Cheng's 90th birthday!

Michael Rank

Birding South Korea in Winter by David Diskin. *Privately published*, 1995. 55pp. Available from NHBS. £14.95, or HK\$120 from David Diskin, Box 952, Shatin Central P.O., Hong Kong (pbk).

South Korea is a little-contemplated, but rather exciting birding destination, particularly in winter. This underwatched country holds internationally important concentrations of Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* and many other exciting species such as Chinese Merganser *Mergus squamatus*, three species of Crane *Grus* spp., Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*, Relict Gull *L. relictus*, Siberian Accentor *Prunella montanella*. Although based on a relatively short visit to the country by the author in 1995, this report is enhanced by the addition of much unpublished information from other observers visiting Korea in recent years.

A general introduction is followed by a very useful practical information section. This gives much valuable information on topics such as



birding strategies, weather, driving in Korea, and birding literature. Details of the main birding sites follow, divided into two sections, those in the north-west and those in the south-east. All the main sites include a bird list and in some cases details of what species have occurred at other seasons. This section represents quite a comprehensive list of the key birdwatching areas. Although the text might have benefited from more maps, the site information is accurate and sufficiently detailed to allow easy access.

The report has a useful annotated systematic list of birds recorded in winter, cross-referenced to each birding site. The species status given follows that of Won Pyong Oh's (1993) *A Field Guide to the Birds of Korea*, the best and most recent annotated list for the country. However, the slowly increasing number of visiting observers will no doubt continue to redefine the status of many of the supposedly scarce or rare species, as the country has very few active observers. An example of this is Yellow-billed Grosbeak *Eophona migratoria*, omitted from Diskin's systematic list as Won refers to it as a summer visitor. It can, however, even be seen in the parks of central Seoul in winter, so at least some birds must be resident, or there is a wintering population consisting of birds that breed further north.

South Korea has much to offer the visiting birder and with luck more foreign visitors might even give conservation a much-needed boost. Any potential winter visitor would be wise to invest in this informative report.

Mark Eldridge

Hong Kong Bird Report 1994. Hong Kong Birdwatching Society. 1995. 228pp. £12.50 (pbk).

At 228 pages this edition of the Hong Kong Bird Report (HKBR) is the largest ever. In typical bird report style there is a month-by-month review of the year (concentrating most on scarce migrants), a systematic list detailing records of the 341 species recorded during the year and a series of notes and papers.

A perusal of the systematic list reveals that 1994 was a record year for the wintering population of both Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* (record count of 78 on 3 December) and Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* (172 on 10 February). It was however a disappointing year for Spoonbill Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* (with a total of

only nine) and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*.

The discovery that two taxa of Spot-billed Duck (Yellow-nib Duck in the HKBR) *Anas poecilorhyncha* are wintering in Hong Kong, namely *A. p. zonorhyncha* and *A. p. harringtoni* is mentioned. The two are stated to breed (partly?) sympatrically although no reference is given. A paper is apparently in preparation and I suspect that this may send many observers back to their notebooks! The elusive Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina eurizonoides* was recorded calling in spring and it is speculated that this species may breed in Hong Kong. Even in a relatively small and well-watched area such as Hong Kong, exciting discoveries are still a possibility. One such recent discovery was the presence in a recent autumn of good numbers of Aleutian Terns *Sterna aleutica* off the east coast, and this continued in 1994 with a maximum of 85 on 1 September.

Some of the English names used may confuse readers unfamiliar with scientific names. Here *Zosterops japonicus* is simply the "White-eye" despite the fact that perhaps 80 species in the Old World share this family name. To be fair, failure to adopt specific (English name) modifiers are few in this publication, indeed far fewer than in most British bird reports.

Following the systematic list are summaries of the winter wildfowl counts (winter 1993-1994) and the ringing report for 1994. There are notes on five new species for Hong Kong. These include Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* and Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii*, both of which are illustrated by excellent photographs of the individuals concerned.

Perhaps of most interest to keen students of identification are the papers on "large white-headed gulls" *Larus*, Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis* / Besra *A. virgatus*, and Dusky *P. fuscatus* / Radde's *P. schwarzi* / Yellow-streaked Warblers, all of which are illustrated with excellent colour photographs.

The first is a well-researched account, with 77 references listed, of the occurrence of adult "Herring Gull types" in Hong Kong. It is, however, much more than this and the authors have managed to produce the best available summary of the identification and systematics of the Asian part of this complex group. The authors are commendably cautious in their approach to naming the Hong Kong birds. The commonest wintering form is now considered to be *Larus*

heuglini taimyrensis (previously these birds were thought to be *L. argentatus mongolicus*). A further five forms showing characters of described taxa occur more rarely whilst a seventh form may prove to be the little-known *L. (cacchinans) barabensis*.

The *Accipiter* paper is a welcome contribution to the scant available literature on the identification of these difficult birds. It is a pity that Eurasian Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*, Chinese Goshawk *A. soloensis*, Shikra *A. badius* and Crested Goshawk *A. trivirgatus* could not be included within the scope of the paper as there is still a need for a well-researched paper on the smaller *Accipiters* of mainland eastern Asia. The Besra records from Hong Kong (illustrating the article) are presumably of the subspecies *affinis*, although this is not stated, and observers should perhaps be wary of applying the identification criteria within the range of other subspecies.

The paper on Dusky, Radde's and Yellow-streaked Warblers is a good summary of the features of this confusing trio. A paper on "Swiftlets in Hong Kong" is an important summary of records of this group during 1990-1994. The paper gives details of three recorded "types" (with two illustrated with photos), although there is, understandably, no attempt to claim any of the records as positively identified to species level. There is a discussion of the likely candidates. The possibility that undescribed taxa of the genus are present in Asia is very real. A paper on egrettries in Hong Kong provides a useful historical overview whilst six short behavioural notes conclude the publication.

The Hong Kong Bird Report continues to maintain the highest standards in both content and

production. It remains an essential purchase for anyone interested in the birds of either the Oriental or the Palearctic Regions. We can only hope that the good work of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society and the production team can be maintained through the handover of the colony in 1997 and well beyond.

Alan Lewis

A Photographic Guide to Birds of Borneo

A Photographic Guide to Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore both by G.W.H. Davison and Chew Yen Fook.

A Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal by Bikram Grewal.

New Holland, 1995. Each with colour photographs illustrating 252 species, £7.99 (pbk).

A review of any publication on the fascinating topic of birds can never be one of single-minded criticism; any book which attempts to provide an insight into the beauty, fascination and importance of birds, whether for the esteemed scientist or the ordinary lay person, serves the cause. Of course, there are varying levels of topics and audiences and no one book or series can address them all. The use of photographic material - as in all these books - to illustrate species, has something to be said for it, depicting living forms and capturing many features (such as stance, pose and disposition) to which illustrations cannot do justice. However, pictures seldom show all the necessary features required for proper and accurate identification. The point is, photographic guides effectively complement definitive handbooks and should not be seen as replacing them.

The coverage of species is where the South-East Asian series really shines. This is one of the best compilations of tropical species ever put together and the photography is testament to Chew Yen Fook's skill and the enormous amount of time and effort he must have put in to get this amazing portfolio of Malaysian birds. Similarly for India, Bikram Grewal has tapped into a large resource of photographic materials available from the country's brilliant field of ornithologists and naturalists.

The text for the two South-East Asian books is written by Geoff Davison, one of Malaysia's foremost naturalists. His succinct language enables most of the relevant information to be included for each species. Bikram Grewal has left out much of



the scientific jargon from the text, which I find makes enjoyable reading and also appeals to a larger audience.

However, the title of the series tends to suggest more than the introductory photographic compilation that the series basically is. These are *not* guides. A major failing of photographic guides is the limitations and availability of photographs. More often than not, publishers have to go with what they have and not what is ideal. As such it is extremely important to state where and when pictures were taken: geographical variation within species, combined with the irritating habit of birds migrating all over the place, make these details very important. I also find that the thumbnail colour tabs are not as easy to use as one would think. To date, I have yet to see an improvement on those used in Lekagul and Round's *A Guide to the Birds of Thailand*.

Birds of Borneo

The guide begins with a concise introduction to the avifauna of Borneo, providing an excellent background for the birdwatcher, both amateur and seasoned. This is the first time photographs of twelve of the Bornean endemics have been published in a single book. This must have been a task in itself.

Some of the species included here are rare or occasional vagrants such as Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica*, which has never been recorded on mainland Borneo, and Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, which would make the sighting of the year! The Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* is extremely localised in southern Borneo and occurs elsewhere as a vagrant. Very small numbers of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* are regularly recorded from north-east Borneo and to see the pelagic Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata*, you would have to leave the shores of Borneo.

A few small criticisms: two Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea* are prominently featured in the picture of the Mongolian Plovers *Charadrius mongolus* but are not described; surprisingly, the only mention of the black race of Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* (restricted to north-east Borneo) appears under Black-and-White Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanoleucus*; and anyone who sees a Crested Jay *Platylophus galericulatus* in Borneo will be looking at a light brown bird, not the black race as shown (this is mentioned in the text).

Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore

This book represents a second photographic treatment of the birds of the Malay Peninsula, following the 1993 book: *Birds: A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore* by Morten Strange and Allen Jeyarajasingam. Again, an excellent introduction to the avifauna of the region is given at the beginning.

I have a few small criticisms: Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* is a rare winter migrant to peninsular Malaysia, with very occasional records down to Singapore, and is never seen with a long tail in its winter quarters; Black-winged Stilt only occasionally turns up on the coast but is really little more than a vagrant; Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica* is on the list of introduced species, but, there is little evidence of its successful colonisation to date; the Sooty-capped Babbler *Malacopteron affine* featured is of the Bornean race which does not have a sooty cap, rather a greyish brown cap; the Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa* featured is of the race *intermedia* which is found in mainland Thailand, where as in peninsular Malaysia the race *religiosa* occurs, which has split lappets and is slightly smaller.

Birds of India and Nepal

For the size of the area covered by this book, 252 species is a mere courtesy. In terms of species, this is an excellent introduction to the more common birds of the Indian subcontinent and the title should reflect this. In the maps included (only this book of the three reviewed has maps), the coverage extends to the countries of Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh, so why call it *Birds of India and Nepal*? The text provides useful information on the habitat and habits of each species, leaving the maps to show distribution. Unfortunately, this is not an accurate way to present distributions, especially for those species with larger ranges.

Compared with the South-East Asian books, this selection is much more one that a birder is most likely to see on a trip across the subcontinent. However, one species which could mislead is Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, which is a winter migrant to India and unlikely to be seen in its breeding condition as shown.

In conclusion, despite their layout and titles, these three pocket-sized books do not come up to expectations as field or identification guides for birdwatching. However, they do represent a collector's series of bird photographs from their respective regions.

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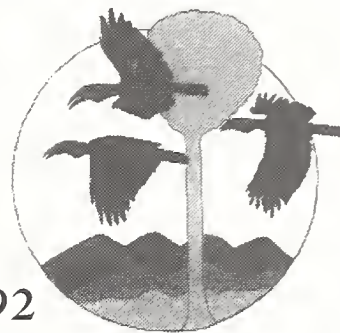
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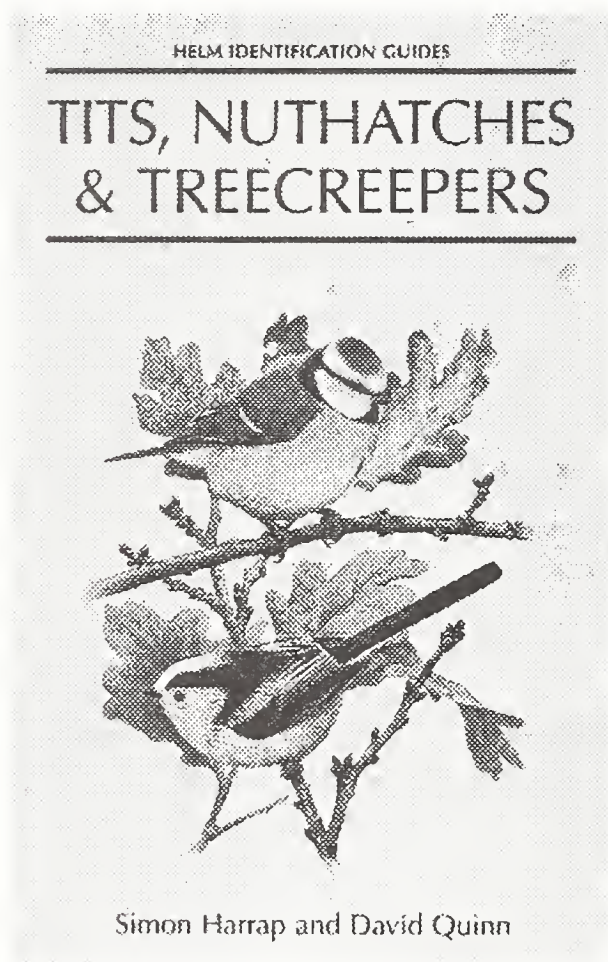
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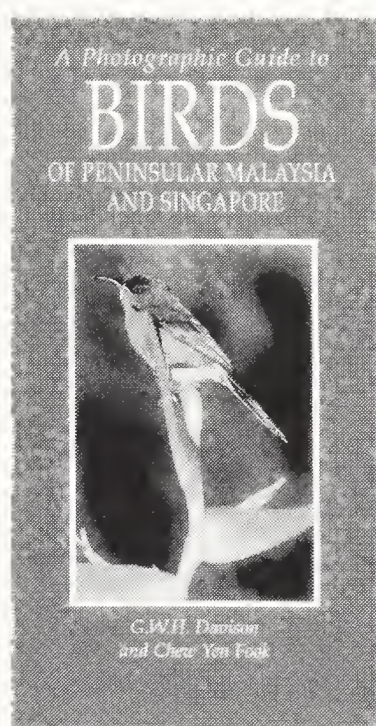
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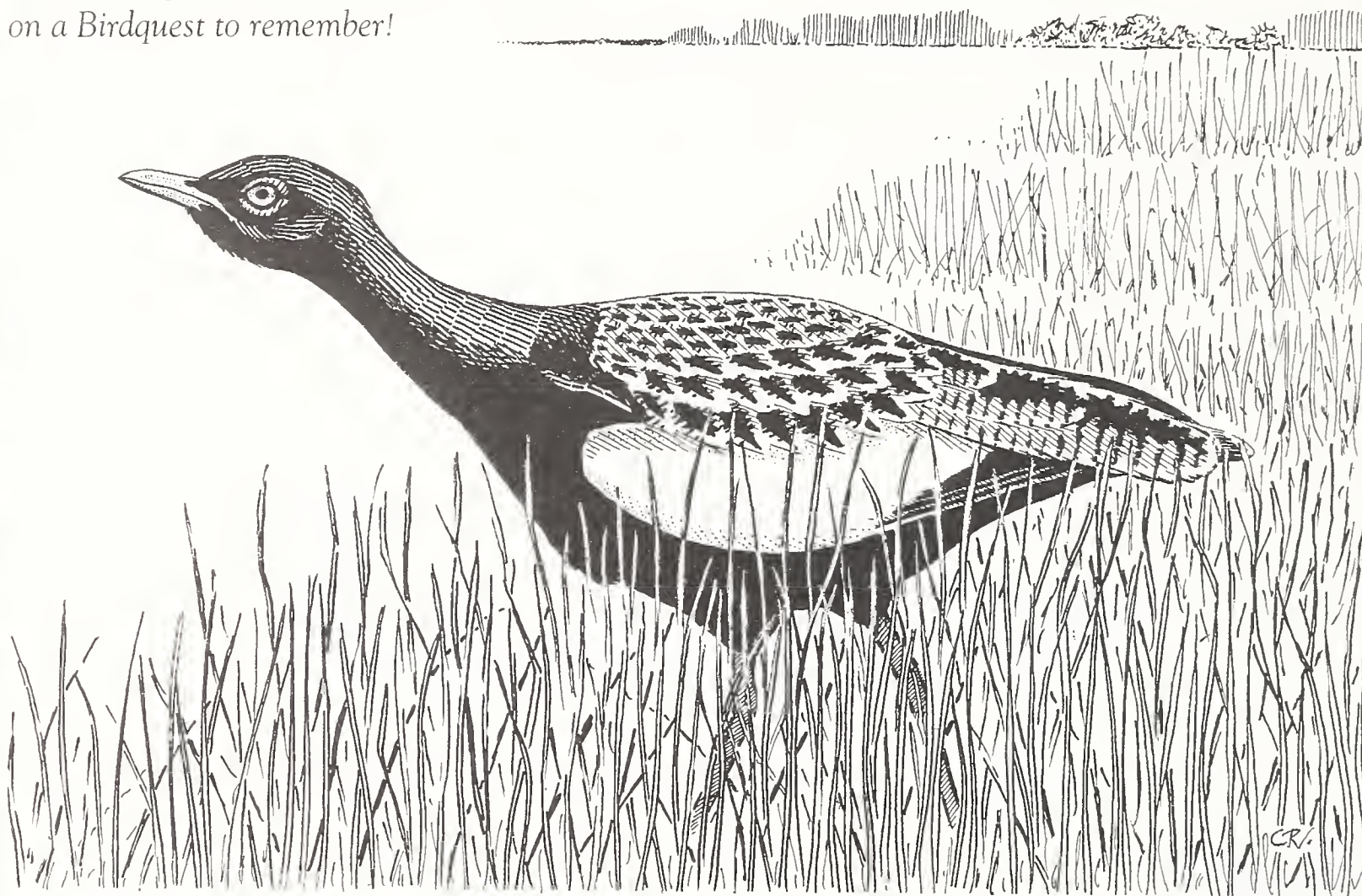
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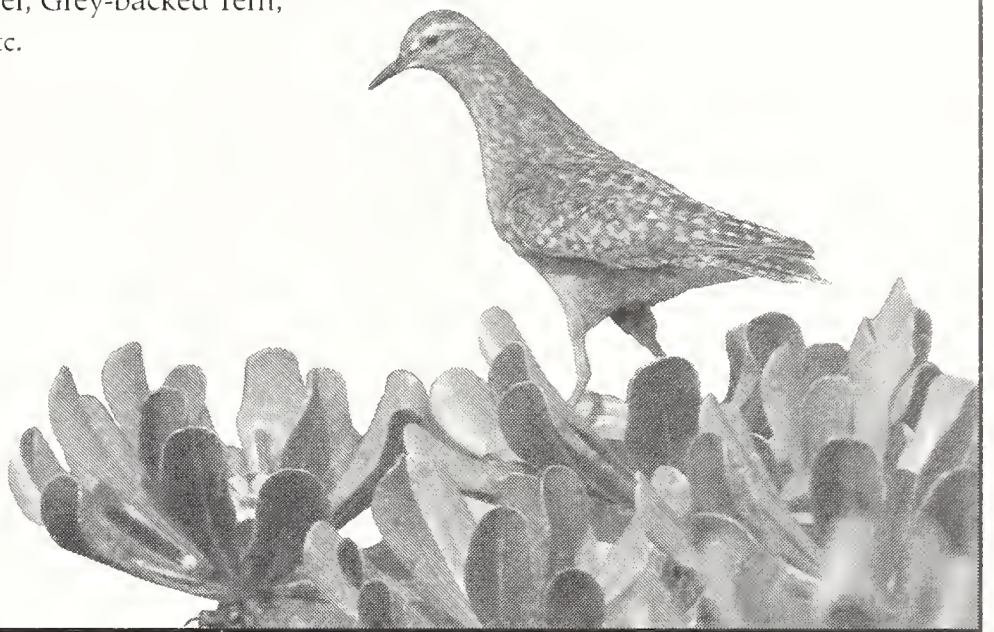
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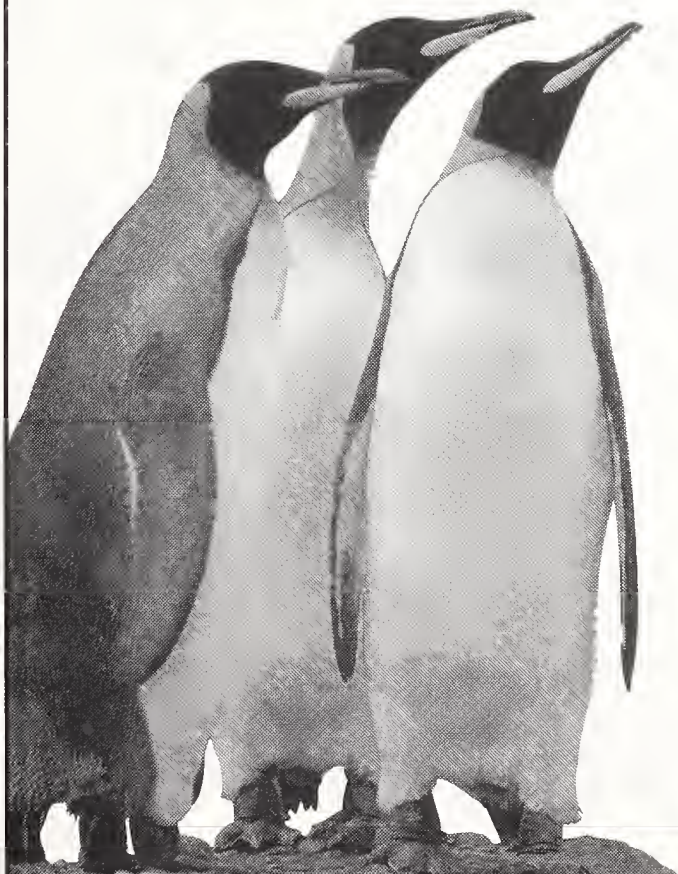
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